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Editor's Notebook

"SMALL" BUDGETS, "BIG" SCRIPTS

As Emile de Antonio points out in this issue, this is a time when the budget of a major Hollywood disaster like *Heaven's Gate* could have financed the entire construction of Renaissance Florence. So there is something immensely heartening when film-makers manage to produce works of the greatest interest on budgets so tiny they would not even make a discernible bulge in the "contingencies" line of a normal industry budget. *The Return of the Secaucus Seven*, a charming and provocative color film made for $65,000 had fresh, unstereotyped performances and sophisticated, perceptive *mise en scène* in the service of an unusually intelligent and quietly witty script. Now Wayne Wang's *Chan Is Missing*, made in black-and-white for an incredible $21,000, has accomplished something similar, though with a different kind of finesse. It has a subject new to American screens: politically hip Asian Americans. It turns to stylistic advantage the stark contrasts of 16mm B&W stock; and, perhaps partly under the protective covering of heavy accents, its performances are almost all surprisingly effective. But it is the wacky intelligence of its script, which plays with stereotypes and anti-stereotypes both ethnic and filmic (half spoofing and half using the tired conventions of the detective plot) that gives the film its distinctive, cynical yet charming bravura. Its dying-fall story line might have been enlivened by a false conclusion preceding the actual inconclusive one; but the film is ingenious and touching. Critics and audiences both like it, as was also the case with *Return of the Secaucus Seven*.

As the theatrical film industry contracts toward a defensive pattern of would-be blockbusters, the virtues of original, finely structured scripts become ever more apparent. The lesson is not in budget numbers. Good scripts are the fundamental weapon the newcomer and outsider have in the struggle to get their work made and seen.

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GEORGE CSICSERY

Individual Solutions:

An Interview with Hector Babenco

Argentine emigré Hector Babenco has established himself after only three films as one of the most important post-"Cinema Novo" directors in Brazil. His films are chronicles of intolerable brutality in the lives of outlaws and outcasts spawned by the unforgiving squalor which is the lot of Brazil's poor. Babenco portrays the struggle for survival in its harshest terms, while evoking moments of exquisite tenderness, selfless love, honor, loyalty, and moral strength. Most astounding is his powerful sense of the absurd. He is able to draw attention to the ridiculous and the mad in the most tragic of circumstances. In PIXOTE, *who can keep from laughing when a handsome well-dressed Brazilian john lustfully embraces a theatrically passionate prostitute only to be confronted by three brats pressing pistols into his face?*

Babenco's second film, LÚCIO FLÁVIO *(1977) became Brazil's fourth largest box-office hit, partially because it told the story of an underground criminal described as South America's Clyde Barrow, but also because Babenco dared to examine Lúcio Flávio's connections with Brazil's notorious police death squads.*

PIXOTE *(1980), Babenco's third film, has achieved international success. The film has mythic qualities embedded in the documentary-like realism which has come to characterize many of the best Brazilian films of the last few years, including Nelson Pereira dos Santos's* THE AMULET OF OGÚM *and Jorge Bodánsky's* IRACEMA.

PIXOTE *received the New York Film Critics Award and the Los Angeles Film Critics Award for Best Foreign Film of the Year (1981). The film was nominated for a Golden Globe as the Best Foreign Film, and Marília Pera was voted Best Actress of the Year by the National Society of Film Critics. The following interview was conducted in Los Angeles on two separate occasions during February and March of 1982 while Hector Babenco and Marília Pera were in the United States to accept their awards and to arrange for distribution of his first two films.*

Since much of what follows concerns ideas and techniques which went into the making of PIXOTE, *a brief synopsis is in order:*

During a routine police sweep of São Paulo streets, Pixote (Fernando Ramos da Silva), an abandoned ten-year-old boy, Lilica (Jorge Julião), an effeminate adolescent, and other boys are taken to a juvenile detention center where they begin to learn the basics of survival in the face of police brutality, rape, and murder. When the web of intimidation and murder perpetrated by the police threatens to engulf them, several of the boys escape. Pixote, Lilica, and Diego (José Nilson dos Santos) find themselves on the street in a group led by Dito (Gilberto Moura), an older macho teenager who becomes Lilica's lover. They pursue a life of petty crime until Lilica makes a sexual conquest of Cristal (Tony Tornado), a drug dealer who commissions the gang to make a cocaine delivery in Rio. In Rio they are ripped off by adult criminals, but inadvertently get their revenge when Pixote stabs the stripper who stole their drugs. Her purse yields a gun and enough money for Pixote, Dito, and Lilica to buy the rights to an aging alcoholic whore named Sueli (Marília Pera), who becomes a mother and lover to the boys. Using her as a decoy they casually mug her customers at gunpoint. The crime wave leads to the group's most harmonious moments, until Lilica gracefully departs, his feminine role usurped by Sueli. One night during a botched mugging Pixote kills both Dito and Sueli's American john. For a moment Sueli contemplates escaping to the country with Pixote, but then rejects him. Pixote goes out on the streets to start a new life, with the gun in his belt.

How did the idea for Pixote *develop?*

My first intention was to make a documentary about abandoned children with children

PIXOTE

in a real reformatory, because they don't do anything all day. They hang around the playgrounds, walk in the corridors; they have nothing to do. I thought that perhaps I can pick up all these children, do improvisations with them in a workshop, and let each one tell me his history for a long 16mm documentary. My vision of the film was a group work involving 200 children, but after ten or twelve visits to the reform school the authorities closed the door on me, stopping me from working in real reformatories. At this point, I very excitedly decided to write a script and do a fiction film—to try to make another reality *like* the reality they wouldn't permit me to show.

How much of the story in the script you wrote for Pixote *with Jorge Duran was based on the novel* Infância Dos Mortos *by José Louzeiro?*

I only bought the rights to the novel because we were making a film about children in the streets of São Paulo and I was afraid of possible conflicts. In the film there is nothing of the novel.

What was the script really based on, if not the novel?

I had done two hundred hours of interviews with real abandoned children in the reformatories. And also, children from the reformatories came to my office to tell me about their lives—in and out of the reformatories. I built my script with the help of situations told to me by these children.

Once the script was written I began working with the child-actors without using the script. The children never read the screenplay. Each day we had a workshop with the idea of developing a new sequence in the script, but each day was as if it were a new film. I told them the situation. We discussed what can happen in the given situation where you are sitting, why? What the reactions can be? And then we did an improvisation based on the situation. After that I looked in my script to correct some dialogue, and in the afternoon we began to shoot. I didn't want the children to memorize the dialogue or to know the whole story. Also, I made the film in dramatic sequence, in the same order as you see it. I made the film in a "real time" schedule for the children's understanding of how the story goes on, to help them understand that what happens today is a consequence of what happened yesterday.

The producers went crazy because the film ended up costing twice as much, but it was

wonderful for the film.

How long did it actually take you to shoot the film this way?

Sixteen weeks.

It has been pointed out that none of the children were professional actors. Where did you find them, and how did you go about selecting them?

The children are from the poor neighborhoods of São Paulo, because in Brazil child actors are very bad. They work in soap operas in television and they are very stereotyped children. I would never have gotten the same results from actors as from the children from the poor districts of São Paulo. It would be impossible. There are a lot of scenes in the film where I wrote the first idea, but the children developed it through improvisation and other things. For example, when the prostitute Sueli and the three children are eating in the bar, I wrote the last line of the scene as Pixote saying, "Okay dinner was good, now I want an ice cream cone to finish dinner." And at that moment he turned to the prostitute and asked her, "And what do you want?" "I want a cognac," she said, but at the same time she understands she is with children and says, "I want a cognac with marshmallows." It's ridiculous for everyone. Then Pixote kisses her on the lips. I didn't write that. This came about as a result of their improvisational work.

Also, the ending: when Pixote leaves the room, putting on his jacket, he takes the gun. It's improvisation because the gun is his gun, a part of his character. He can't go out into the street without the gun. The child improved the character very much. He worked hard for a long time.

But how did you actually find and select the children to play each character?

The producer went to the neighborhoods and prepared the population, talking to them until we arrived. Then we did some collective exercises. We worked for almost a month in all these neighborhoods to find these kinds of children. At the beginning there were 800 children every day.

Then we went into a small theater downtown, and the production paid for the selected children to come to the theater to begin workshops. At the beginning there were eight or nine in each group. We had three or four groups for four months working three to four and a half days each week. Then we exchanged the groups, and each month we had an improvisation with all the groups for me to take out some of them so there would be fewer people. This went on until I decided who would be Pixote, who would be Lilica, Dito, and the others. The seven children who did the film were prepared for four months.

These children didn't know about anything; not about evil, about responsibility, about memory. They are very tough and tense. I needed to relax them and show them understanding. It was very difficult to work with them. I don't know if I ever experienced anything as hard in my life. We were crazy to do that, but I think I would not have found the same result another way.

Why did you choose Fernando Ramos da Silva to play Pixote? Was it what one critic called his "preternaturally aged face," or the impassive look on his face—as if he were not really present, but constantly observing and analyzing everything around him?

At first I had four or five choices for the character Pixote. One night after midnight every second phone call I got was collect from a name that I didn't know. Finally I accepted, and he said, "You don't remember me. My name is Fernando. Last Monday the producer gave me bus money to come to the workshop, but my brother stole my money and I've been missing three times." And he cried on my phone because "I want to be an actor." I said, "Okay, take a taxi tomorrow and the company will pay the taxi and we'll resolve the problem."

The next day he arrived very dirty, without shoes, without anything. He didn't know how to read or write. He never went to school. He was like the character Pixote. He didn't believe in anything. His life was a daily fight with reality.

But when we began to give the children the chance to express themselves, to imagine situations and to represent them, it became easier to work with them. After two or three weeks the child really half-trusted me.

Were you able to maintain his trust throughout the film?

The first day of shooting I repeated the same shot with Pixote six times. At the end of each shot I told him "Okay, fantastic, but I want to do it again." And after that I said "Okay, fantastic, but I want to do it again." He was be-

coming very angry with me. At the end of the day my assistant came and told me, "Hector, Fernando doesn't want to come to work tomorrow, and he wants to abandon the film." I asked her why? And she answered, "Because he told me that you are a liar." I said, "I am a liar? I never told him a lie." I knew very well that my relations with him were very honest. And I called Fernando.

We walked around the block to begin the conversation, and I asked him, "My assistant tells me that you won't come to work tomorrow, and you told her that I am a liar. Can you explain that?" He said, "Hector, you really are a liar, because after each shot you told me that it was fantastic, it was wonderful, but you want to repeat it. If the shot is good and fantastic, why do you want to make another one? Why don't you tell me that you don't like it and that's why you want to repeat the shot?"

They don't know anything about movies. I stopped the film, and the next day I put all the children in my car and took them to the moviola. I taught them how we edit film, how we choose the material for a film. Fernando saw the six or seven takes of the same shot, and I asked him, "Which is the best for you? Can you see the difference? In this one your face is very sad. In this other one your face is not in a good position." And he began to understand how we made the film. It was school for all of us; for me and for them.

Did you spend any time studying the well-known directors who got great performances out of non-actors, like Abel Gance, Bresson, Visconti, or De Sica?

I never studied cinema, or read any books about movies, about technical language. For me it's either emotion or mind. I never studied the films that I saw in my life. I never became preoccupied with trying to understand how the director did this or that scene, how he picked this kind of language or that one.

How then did you develop your technique for working with the children in Pixote?

I worked in the theater when I was an adolescent, and I remembered all of the exercises, improvisation, and all the workshops we did. Also, I like to work with people. For me, beginning to understand sensitive relationships and beginning to build characters is like playing, it's like a game.

In *Pixote* I also had an assistant who helped

Fernando Ramos da Silva: Pixote

prepare the children. For many years she had worked in therapy groups for people in jail. Twice a week she worked with adult men in prison, and twice a week in a women's prison . . . not psychology and not sociology. She was an actress, and very talented at doing that. She helped me very much with the children. Other than that, it was my feelings.

What happened when you brought a professional actress like Marília Pera in to work with the children?

Marília Pera began acting in theater when she was six years old. She was an exception. I had invited many actresses to play the character Sueli, but the very important actresses in Brazil didn't accept because the character's time in the film is only 15 or 20 minutes. At the time Marília was busy with theater, but one day I invited her to watch a workshop done by the children. A half hour later she called me back to say she wanted to work with me and the children—without reading the script. She understood very quickly the kind of relationship needed to work with the children to achieve a great performance. She became another child, without other levels, without differences. She came to the workshops the same time each day as the children because she wanted to begin work with them, even though I did not ask her to come until hours later.

What happened to Fernando and the other boys after you finished the film? Did they go back onto the streets?

The background Fernando came from was the same as that of the character he played in the film. But for him it was different. After the film opened in Rio, a journalist asked Fernando if he wasn't afraid to live through the

same situations as were shown in the film. He said, "Sorry, but in the film that was Pixote, my name is Fernando." He could not accept the idea that the two are the same; and I'm telling you it is one and the same, because at ten o'clock Fernando is in the street and the police ask him where he's going. And he answers, "I don't know." They say, "Come with us." And the film begins again. The reality of Fernando's life is the same as Pixote's. At the point that he gets picked up in the street he can become the same as Pixote became in the film. But he didn't accept that idea, because for him it's so different . . . being an actor. When I first screened the film for the crew and for the children, I asked Fernando if he liked the film. He said, "There are two or three scenes I would like to repeat because I don't like my performance." He had become an actor, and was so sad.

Fernando now works in soap operas on television, but they don't want to renew his contract because he's very lazy and can't keep up with the fast pace of soap opera shooting. They make one segment a day. He doesn't know how to read and write, and for him it's very difficult to memorize the lines. It's very different from our work with him. He is 12 years old now and is going to school, not the same boy at all as before we did the film.

He lives in the same place. There's no more money in his pocket, he has the same friends, but inside he's not the same person because he knows different people now. From working with us he learned that you don't need to lie, and that it's important to take responsibility. The film has changed his whole life. I think it was very important for all those children, including the boy who played Lilica. He's a fantastic actor. He now works in theater. He is the only one that found an adult job after *Pixote.*

Are you saying that their lives were changed because they were given a chance to play with their imaginations?

On one level I made the film only to prove that it was possible to change a child. When you arm this child, and three, four million other children by helping them to begin thinking, he begins to resemble you and me. When you help these people they grow up very quickly. This is the real problem of the film.

You know it would be impossible to make a film like Pixote *in the United States using real children. I wonder if you've been attacked for exposing your child actors to such blatant sex and violence during the filming?*

Of course. Last year my film was screened at the Biarritz Film Festival, and the mayor of the city put up a poster saying: "This film contains very hard and strong scenes. Delicate people should not come to see the film." They are crazy. In Brazil we have no more censorship now.

We need to look at reality, and sometimes our preconceptions are larger than that reality. For example, the feeling about promiscuity that these children have is very different from our idea of promiscuity. When I did the scene in which Pixote and Lilica watch Dito, the black boy, having sex with Sueli the prostitute, I wrote the scene putting Pixote and Lilica in another room while Dito and Marília Pera are making love—and they are watching like voyeurs. After ten minutes, Pixote, I mean Fernando, came in and said, "Hector, why when we're together watching television we are on the same bed, and why when my friend makes love to her we aren't on the bed?"

He corrected me, because my understanding and my vision are very bourgeois and moralistic. Fernando lives in one room with his eight brothers, his mother and his father. For him promiscuity is different than for you or for me. That doesn't make him good or bad. It's only that he's different. For me it's impossible to understand because my education and background are so different. But I learned a lot from the children when I did the film. What is important is how he feels morality, how he understands morality. What is his relationship to feelings? With responsibility? With love? With real affection? That is important. And that has nothing to do with promiscuity.

So you are saying that in order to capture someone else's reality, someone else's moral values, you have to suspend your own evaluation of reality. To me this verges on a documentary approach. Do you have a background in documentaries?

Two or three commercial documentaries, but nothing really. Of course I consider my cinema a very real cinema, but Brazil is a very special country. In Brazil reality is two or three times more exciting and sophisticated than any picture. I take things from reality,

but my films are not journalistic films. My films are not made up of realistic scenes. In *Pixote* you have a realistic background. Of course these children exist, and these kinds of relationships in the reformatory also exist. But the most important thing is not showing how these people live, but showing how these people are *not* able to find a way to live.

Some people tell me my films are very political, they are social denunciations. This isn't true. You can study all the political or socially condemning feature-type films—Costa-Gavras, other directors—and you will see the difference very quickly between my cinema and these others. In these others you can find a very precise ideology. In my films there isn't anything like that. I don't believe in political messages or flags. You won't find a flag in my films. The most important thing in my films are the interrelations between these people, these children. In *Pixote* I wanted to discover when a child becomes an adult. He may be nine, ten, or fourteen years old, but he's an adult.

Of course in order to make this inquiry, to carry out this research, I can't forget the background where these children live, because it's very strong, very real. For *Pixote* I used one kind of portrait, one kind of framing. Each frame looks like a painting. There aren't long traveling shots. I did not want the camera between me and reality. I wanted to put it aside. I wanted the camera only for registering this reality. I wanted to use it minimally, only as much as was necessary to capture this reality.

When people talk it's very hard. But the dialogue never escapes reality. Sometimes it doesn't express reality—it intends to tell something else. I don't accept films where they put poetry in the characters' mouths. Because sometimes when you work with a very horrible reality like poverty in the slums, it's okay the way it is. I photograph it the way it is. If I put my intelligence and my sense of poetry in my characters, I would lose the parameters of what I want to say.

How exactly do you protect the language of your characters from your . . .

. . . Influence? I don't influence them. I don't have influence because I'm outside.

How do you stay outside?

In order to make the film I had to become a child too. I wasn't in a superior position to the children. Making this film was also an exercise for me. But inside I knew very well where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do.

But then what do you actually tell the actors to do?

I didn't tell them anything, because they discovered what they needed to say alone. I never told them to speak one line then another sentence. Never. That was only in the script and for me, so that I wouldn't lose what I was after. I studied my script, but I went to the workshops with the children to do the improvisation. They gave me the right words, the right sentences. I never told them exactly what to say. But at the same time it isn't a documentary because we worked hard with the children. We prepared the scenes in a way that satisfied them and also satisfied me. We did it together. And then I said, "Okay, I need two mechanical performances so I'll know how to shoot it." I introduced *the problem* camera only at the end—before that we only worked in improvisation.

You rehearsed it and let them form the language. You say that this isn't documentary, but there are more and more documentaries being made using the same, or similar techniques.

No, because they performed exactly what I had in the script. The things they did in the workshop were the same as what I had done two months earlier when I wrote the script. Only the ending with Pixote walking on the tracks wasn't in my script.

In my script, after Pixote leaves Sueli's room the camera moves outside to show 25 people standing at a bus stop. There were workers, students, many different kinds of people. Pixote enters the frame and stands by the wall like the others waiting for the bus. And he begins playing with the wall, scrawling on it. At the same time the camera starts a small zoom away from the bus. When the bus leaves all the people have gotten on the bus and the frame is empty. The camera zooms in quickly to the wall, and you read on the wall, "The heart is round like an orange." It's the same sentence that he wrote in the middle of the film when he was learning how to write.

In another interpretation this becomes the story of a grafitti. Sometimes you read grafitti and you don't know who wrote it. This is really a story about grafitti—Pixote's story. I shot

two versions of the ending, one without Pixote —only the grafitti—and another one with him and the grafitti, with Pixote in the frame too at the end, looking at the camera. It's a kind of "J'Accuse" look at the camera. The shot looks like a freeze frame, but it's not a freeze frame, he's just staring at the camera.

You didn't use either ending, instead you have him walking on the tracks.

The papers were writing about grafitti every day. People suddenly discovered grafitti. Grafitti became too popular, so I changed the ending.

You said earlier that you set out to discover how a child becomes an adult. What did you find out about this process?

I saw when I first visited the reformatory that the added experience of some kinds of situations make you older than before. In the film, when Pixote kills the blond woman, he doesn't kill her—he just sticks a knife in her stomach. He doesn't want to kill anyone. He wants the money. The fight between the woman and the child is the same as children playing in kindergarten. "Give me my pocketbook." "I don't want to give it to you." "Please give it to me." Whap.

We tried to recreate all the children's situations because they are children and they relate to the world at a childhood level. But of course at the end of the film Pixote is not the same boy as at the beginning. He learns survival during a very short time, and becomes a marked man for the rest of his life. Where can you save this boy? Never. You can pay $1 million to the biggest doctor in the whole world and you won't be able to save this boy. He's lost.

Have you been criticized for having such a skeptical perspective?

Of course. They didn't invite the film to the film festival in Havana. They said the same thing that the moral conservatives tell me. Extreme left-wing people and extreme right-wing people are in exactly the same position on this film. The left-wing people say, "You show the dirt in society, but you don't say who is at fault." Left-wing people want a theorem. They want a formula.

I know the kinds of films being made in all the countries of South America, and I'm sure that my films and not the leftist films are the most socially powerful. I don't believe in the solution proposed by the leftists. I believe only in individual solutions. And I did *Pixote* in order to show that. The relationships of one man, two, three, four or five men, are more important than the whole society.

The world of definitions is so easy. When you find the right word to define something, you lose the thing because you found the word. I tried to destroy the word and really pick up reality and look at it on all its sides to try to discover how I can not only help this reality, but also how I can perhaps change the reality. In the process I discovered that reality is not as bad as we think it is. The moral conceptions of poor children are so different from our conception of morality. Their sexual morality is different from mine or yours or my daughter's.

You can read about conventions where 500 psychologists go to a big hotel for a week to discuss abandoned children. Each one gives his own explanation, but nobody goes to the child to ask him: What do you want? What do you think about your life? There is no one solution for two or three people. All the solutions are individual solutions. Each person has his own salvation card.

It seems from the film that you believe there is some hope in the small survival groups people create in bad situations, in a sort of artificial family. In many ways the small gang that Pixote and his friends form is the most positive human structure in the film.

The film isn't only about relationships and conditions in a reformatory. It's about discovering how children begin relationships, and how the family is the most important nucleus. When the children escape the reformatory and four or five of them are alone in the street they unconsciously become a family. The group is created for instinctive reasons, not out of a desire on the part of the boys to live together and work together. It's out of need—real need.

And does this inevitably lead to the creation of a group resembling the nuclear or traditional family?

. . . And the need to make a family among women is larger than in men. Women really make the family. If you go to a reform school for women it looks like 20 families living together. One woman is the man, another woman is the wife, other women are the children, sisters, and brothers. Each family is in a group, the same group you find in *Pixote* in the second half of the film after they excape.

Director Hector Babenco shooting PIXOTE

When they meet the prostitute Sueli, she takes the place of the woman, and the group is broken up. We had this conceptual point of view before we started writing the script. It's because of this that I'm sure the film is not only a social documentary, or a social criticism film. It touches on other levels of knowledge about the relationships of the children.

If these kinds of groups are so much more visible and stronger among women why didn't you make a film about institutionalized women or girls?

I preferred concentrating on men because I'm a man and I know the needs of men very well. Perhaps if I were a woman I would prefer making a film about abandoned girls—because it's another tragedy.

During the last few years there have been a couple of excellent films on the subject of abandoned and incarcerated girls. One is János Rózsa's Sunday Daughters, *about girls in a Hungarian reform school, and another is the highly popular* Christiane F *from Germany, about an abandoned girl in Berlin.*

When I began writing my script I read a newspaper story about a reformatory for girls where 14 girls tried to commit suicide together by drinking four bottles of some very strong cleaning fluid. It was incredible. But this isn't only a Brazilian social problem. You have these kinds of relationships in US reform schools as well. It's not only a South American problem.

It's interesting you should say that, because one of the most powerful scenes in Rózsa's Sunday Daughters *is a group suicide scene in which five girls get drunk and cut their wrists on broken bottles in the reform school. But to get back to* Pixote: *essential to the original group of boys is the transvestite Lilica, who fulfills all the feminine roles until the boys meet Sueli. Pauline Kael likened Lilica to the Giulietta Masina character in* Nights of Cabiria; *he is so emotionally sensitive, wise, and romantic. Where did this character come from?*

I've seen many Lilicas in the schools and in the streets. She takes the place of the woman in the family—in this kind of family. I have empathy with this character and I like him, but he's there mostly because he exists. We need to make films and write about things we know. It is a way of paying tribute or homage to these people who accept life with such dignity in these hard conditions. The characters are my heroes.

Is there any discrimination in Brazil against transvestites, or against homosexuals?

There is a lot of discrimination. He's integrated only in this (Pixote's) group. The Cubans didn't accept the film for the Havana Film Festival. They said that the film has too much immorality, and that homosexuality is a capitalist sickness.

What about Sueli? Where did the character for the prostitute originate?

At the beginning of the film I explain that the film is not about orphans, but about abandoned children. But not only children are abandoned in the world. I am abandoned also —today, yesterday. It's an emotional state. If you are sure about your life you're dead. You don't live. Sueli is another abandoned woman.

I like people who have suffered every day of their lives. The character Sueli is a very poor woman. She doesn't have anything in life. She cries for the stupidest things because anyone can stop her in the doorway at night. It's ridiculous, but that ridiculous situation is the most important thing for her. And because of that she's important.

At the end of the film, why does Sueli suddenly reject Pixote instead of pursuing the more harmonious possibilities suggested when she takes him in her arms and nurses him as if he were her own child?

She doesn't have the structure to accept him. Can you imagine an ending where Sueli tells Pixote to stay with her? Can you believe that? I'm sure that if I gave the scene to Pixote and Sueli without a script the ending would have been the same as it is in the film and in the script. I shot one version where Pixote goes to the door, looks back at Sueli and says, "I'll see you later." "Later" in the sense of tomorrow or never. I'll see you again some day. It was fantastic. I'm sure that if we did it in improvisation it would come out the same as what I wrote.

Another thing is that reality is twice as strong as what you see in the film. My film is a Cinderella tale in comparison with the reality. Families are being destroyed because people don't make enough money to meet the family's minimum needs. It's a major social problem. At the beginning of the film I explain that the film does not talk about exceptions, or about orphans, but about abandoned children. They are all children who have homes, but sometimes there's only a father, or the father and mother work away from home many hours a day and the children are at home.

It's a political question. I want rich people to begin thinking that the only way to stay rich is by helping the workers. Because if they don't change their mentality, in a few years Brazil and the other countries will become the

PIXOTE: *The ending*

new Nicaraguas and the new El Salvadors. There is no other solution than that rich people understand that they need to take less money each year and pay those who work for them more. When you have 120 million people like in Brazil, and five million live very very well and 115 million live very very badly, you break the balance. This is not leftist radical politics, or my invention. It's the historical reality. And the men who have the power are beginning to understand that they can't keep going on this way.

But this isn't only a Brazilian or South American problem. In New York, ten minutes from the Museum of Modern Art you have the same problems. But American industry doesn't finance films that look like *Pixote.* The Bronx is waiting for its *Pixote,* and Harlem awaits a film like *Pixote.* In the moral sense of the word, Brazilian censorship is not as strong as the financial and economic censorship you have in the U.S. We need to rethink which is more democratic. Here you can do anything you want because nobody tells you not to, but people won't give you money to do the film. In Brazil I made this film with money from the government. Obviously they don't like it, but they didn't forbid me to make the film. Embrafilm, a kind of Canadian Film Board, gave us the money to make the film.

Your films are more open and more realistic than films made in almost any other country today. Was there any interference at all when you made Pixote*?*

They didn't give me permission to shoot the film in the reform schools, but they didn't have the power to prevent me from doing the film out of the schools. The reform school in *Pixote* was made out of an old military barracks we rented when we were preparing the script.

At one time censorship was very serious in Brazil.

We haven't had censorship since 1979.* A film can be banned for those under 14 or under 18. There's nothing else.

Look, the film I made before *Pixote* is about the relationship of the paramilitary police groups with a very famous bandit in Rio named Lúcio Flávio. It's a kind of *Serpico* taking place in Rio. For ten years this bandit worked with partners who were in the police. One day he decided to break with his life and to write the papers and tell everyone about his connections. It's a true story.

We made *Lúcio Flávio* in 1976 and 1977 when political repression in Brazil was at its worst. The newspapers, television and radio news, all the people working in information, were forbidden to talk about the death squads. When the film opened in Brazil it made a real commotion because there were eight million spectators in four months. It was the first time that the audience saw how crime was organized, because a lot of people thought that the death squad was only a paramilitary organization, and no one knew until the film opened that the death squad was made up of ordinary police without uniforms. In Rio alone the death squad killed 1,500 people each year for the last ten years.

Is there still a death squad in Brazil today?

They don't kill more than 150 people a year. The situation is better—80% better.

Weren't you afraid that something would happen while you were making the film?

No, because it was secret. You couldn't talk about it.

Yet you made a film about the death squads?

Yes, but I spoke about the death squads only between the lines. It was the tip of an iceberg. Because of this audiences who don't know how the political police function don't understand the film. For people who don't have the same kind of police there is information missing from the film for a coherent reading of the situation in *Lúcio Flávio.* I showed the film to the president of a big Italian distribution company. Afterwards he asked me, "But where is the death squad in this film?"

*In April, 1982, two months after this interview was completed, the Brazilian government cancelled the première of director Roberto Farias's *Onward Brazil,* a film about terrorism, repression, and police torture during the period 1969-1974. Farias has said that his film about an apolitical Brazilian swept up in the violence of the times is really "about the fear everyone felt in those days." The film was banned because it was judged to pose a "potential provocation against the current regime." The controversy has resulted in the dismissal of the state film industry's president, and may dampen hopes for the political liberalization process described by Babenco here. Future works by Farias and "other enterprising Brazilian directors" are in the balance. (*Veja* of São Paulo, April 14, 1982)

He didn't understand that the people working in the death squad are the same people that work in the police. Neither have uniforms, because in South America, you know . . . People from Peru, Chile, Argentina, even from Mexico understand very quickly. But in the industrialized countries people don't know this reality. Because of this *Lúcio Flávio* has not been seen by audiences in North America or in Europe.

How did the Brazilian government react to the film?

For many months they wanted to ban the film, but we negotiated the addition of a written sentence at the end of the film. When the screen goes black it says, "All the policemen involved in the Lúcio Flávio affair were kicked out of the police and punished." I don't think I translated it for foreign prints, but in the Brazilian theaters, when people read this sentence they all laughed.

In other words the death squad members were not kicked out of the police or punished?

Yes, it's a lie. I had to negotiate the sentence so that they wouldn't ban the film.

Lúcio Flávio *like* Pixote *is a realist film, except for two dream sequences, both of which are violent. After he sniffs glue, Pixote hallucinates walking on the freeway naked at night, but it's very clearly a hallucination brought on by the glue. The dream sequences in* Lúcio Flávio *are more arbitrary, like the dreams in Buñuel's* Los Olvidados.

The dreams in *Lúcio Flávio* take place because sometimes you need all the levels of language to make a film. In *Lúcio Flávio* there is a narrative line like in a newsreel. All the situations are very rational constructions like in a chess game. The camera arrives exactly when something is about to happen. Too many lines crossing. But in the end I know very well what each character represents in this game of chess. I wanted to break that. And I needed to break it with emotions, not with another rational process. So I chose the woman because she was very simple, unsophisticated, like any girl who works in a coffee shop. She's a simple woman in love with this man (Lúcio Flávio). She doesn't know anything about his work. She only loves him because she's happy with him. So I made this nightmare with two ugly characters in the film, two of the police, only to validate her presence in the film, to validate her relationship with Lúcio Flávio. [In the nightmare the police attack Lúcio Flávio's girlfriend, tear her dress off and murder her. Another dream at the end of the film is very different. Lúcio Flávio is in prison. He dreams that his cellmates stab him to death while he's sleeping. When he awakens from the dream the beginning of the dream starts to repeat itself, but the film ends before he is actually stabbed.—G.C.]

The censors in Brazil could never accept the idea that the film would end by showing a man murdered in prison, especially a man whom the police captured and then publicized widely as their responsibility. In reality two men were put in the cell and paid five dollars to kill him. You know how crazy it is.

And how was I, in 1977 in Brazil during the hardest censorship, going to finish my film? I knew the film would not be released, so I invented the dream because it was a solution people would understand—Lúcio Flávio dreams that people are killing him and the film ends while he is still alive.

One moment before they kill him in reality . . .

Yes, but it's the same shot at the end as during the dream.

It was very powerful even though your reason for doing it may have been to throw off the censors.

It was a bridge to begin thinking of another solution for the censor. Afterwards I liked the solution. But you know, the *real* man who killed Lúcio Flávio was also killed in prison one day before the film opened in Rio de Janeiro.

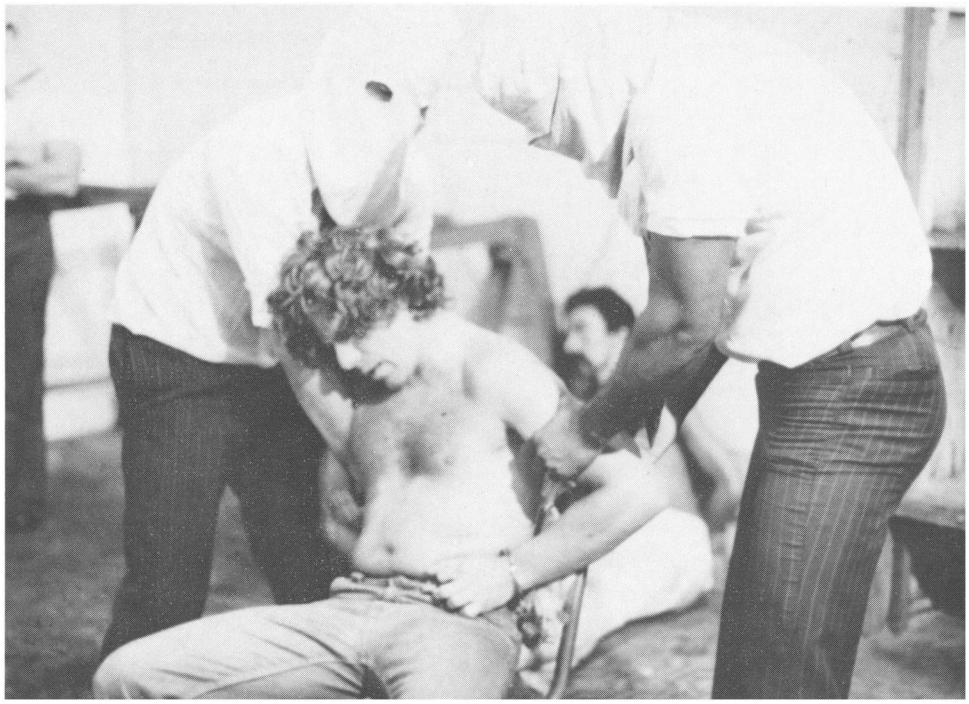
Did people already know about the film?

The film opened three weeks earlier in São Paulo. There was incredible publicity. Newspapers, television, everyone was talking about the film. And then the film opened in 65 theaters in Rio de Janeiro. Never had a film opened in so many theaters at the same time in one city. Sixty percent of the theaters in town were running *Lúcio Flávio* for three weeks.

Did this success inspire the wave of Brazilian films about death squads?

Of course, but the other two or three films were bad commercial films—in the worst sense. Not one was a quality film, or true.

Both Lúcio Flávio *and* Pixote *are about hopelessly alienated people—outlaws, abandoned children, transvestites, street prostitutes, etc. How did you develop such a strong*



Babenco's Lúcio Flávio

affinity for the dispossessed?

All the outsiders, marginal people, people with nothing, are innocent. If you are in society and you play the game with the real rules of the game then you kill your innocence. Years ago I read a conversation between Krishnamurti and Carl Jung in which they concluded that people must be cured to live in society with the knowledge that society is wrong. I prefer the sick people because they are pure. I'm together with these people. I'm one of the outsiders too. For years I lived in Europe and didn't have money. I was in Italy and Spain trying to find jobs, but never found one. When you don't have money and you're living with a hundred people in one room, it's very difficult. The feeling of innocence that you see in Pixote and the prostitute, and also in my first film *The King of the Night*—is my trademark.

There is some similarity between your notion of the innocence of the outsiders as you call them, and the portrayal of the 15-year-old Indian girl who becomes a traveling prostitute in Amazonas in Jorge Bodánsky's film Iracema. *Is this theme gaining importance in Brazilian films?*

Jorge Bodánsky and I have the same feelings about Brazilian reality. He was my first friend when I arrived in Brazil during the early seventies. He was working as a documentary cinematographer, and we made a ten-minute documentary about the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo. After that he began *Iracema* in 1974 with German television (ZDF), and I began my first film, *The King of the Night.* We both know how different our work is; he makes all his films in 16mm in *cinéma vérité,* but some day I plan to make a film in partnership with Bodánsky.

What you said about the outsiders and your identification with the poor almost resembles a religious, or mystical approach. Is there anything like that in your background?

I was a very cultured adolescent. I read a lot of books. At the age of 14 I thought like a 25- or 30-year-old man, and when I was 18 I looked like a 40-year-old. I knew everything, but had never lived anything. One day I took a ship from Buenos Aires to Europe with $17 in my pocket. For seven years I traveled around the world like the hippies. I was very interested in Jack Kerouac, Ferlinghetti, Ginsberg, Céline, Robert Musil, Jean Genêt—all these writers, Henry Miller. I left town to get to know the world, to live, to meet people, to transform my person. It was kind of a divine mission. For years and years there were days that I'm very sure that I was crazy, really crazy.

Then because I had always liked films I began working in Spain and Italy as an extra in spaghetti westerns (many Sergio Corbucci films with Giuliano Gemma and others). One day I decided to find a place to live because I didn't want to live in Europe. I chose Brazil because I had stopped there for four months when I first left Argentina to go to Europe. In my memory Brazil was a fantastic, magic place. A friend helped me make the first payment on a ticket and I began my life again at 26 in Brazil.

At first I worked in many different jobs. I worked as a waiter. For a year I took polaroid pictures in restaurants and nightclubs. I worked another six months selling bibles door to door. For three years I worked different jobs to conquer my freedom so I could make movies. But I always worked in things where I didn't have an employer. I wanted my freedom; it's the most important thing.

How did you get the chance to make your first film?

My first wife helped me, along with many friends.

The King of the Night *(1975), which also stars Marília Pera as a prostitute, is virtually unknown in the United States.*

It's about a hypocritical man who loved many women. He is born into a good family. At the age of 28 he has a fiancée whom he dutifully visits three times a week. Then he meets a prostitute who falls in love with him and abandons her work to live with him. After a year and a half of living together she has an abortion for him. Then he abandons her because his personality can't stand the idea of living with a woman who was a prostitute.

He returns to his fiancée's sister, because his fiancée has become crazy. She puts on a white dress and walks around in the street—mad. When he returns he gets engaged to the second sister who is very fat, very ugly, but kind and sweet with a good understanding disposition. He marries her.

After nine years of marriage he is unhappy. He works hard in an office, has two children—his life has become ridiculous. He begins an extramarital life with other women—secretaries, operators, switchboard operators. One day he comes home to find his wife trying to commit suicide with a razor. She admits that she is ugly and tells him that she knows he needs other women, and begs him to kill her because she can't stand to live without him. She then watches as my hero puts poison in big chocolate candies. One day she eats all the chocolates and goes to his job to ask him for a last kiss—with all the chocolate still in her mouth.

At the same time an old woman has taken it upon herself to come and tell him that the prostitute he lived with 20 years earlier is very sick. He goes to the slums and finds this very beautiful woman ruined and ugly. In a melodramatic scene she calls him a coward and expels him from her house. When he arrives home anguish-stricken he finds his wife half dead. He puts the last two candies in her mouth to help her die.

A little black humor after the melodrama.

There are two or three kinds of language in the film. At the funeral which follows his voice drifts over saying, "I think that my destiny with my wife was right for God," and he starts looking at the third sister, who is very religious. He ends up fucking this third sister at his wife's funeral while she's praying to Christ. It looks like a Buñuel film.

Is that the end of the film?

No. Twenty years later he comes out of prison a 70-year-old man with white hair. And with quick cutting we see him working in many different jobs for old people—selling lottery tickets every week, advertising in the streets, etc.—to fantastic music by Astro Piazzola. The ending is a cubist tango, a Stravinsky-like tango. All through the film there is a classical tango leitmotif, but at the end it's destroyed. It becomes unharmonious and rough. At the very end there is a four-minute shot with him drunk in the night alone in the street. That's all.

How did it compare with other Brazilian films made in 1975?

Under the heaviest censorship in Brazil, between 1972 and 1978, people began to make comedies with small erotic scenes, very low-cost films made in 15-20 days. They are very naive films. The plot is usually about a girl from the country who can't find a place to live in the big city. Ninety percent of these films are garbage. But from these films you can understand the needs and values of the people, their conception of eroticism and other things. If you add up several of these unimportant films you can see the face of a culture. They

are made quickly for fast exploitation of the market. But it's better to have a bad Brazilian film than to have a bad French or American film. We are a young country, and I prefer young people to begin by seeing Brazilian films rather than foreign films.

What will your next film be about?

I have two projects. One is *The Emperor of Amazonas,* a book written by Márcio Souza. It's the story of an adventurer during the rubber boom at the beginning of the century in the Amazon. Amazonia was among the richest countries in the world. People didn't have electricity in their houses, but they had their shirts laundered in London. Amazonia is like Alaska. It has its own madness, a kind of delirium. It is common to hear stories about men who go to Amazonia, go crazy and stay there in search of the gold of a lost civilization.

It sounds a little like the idea behind Werner Herzog's new film Fitzcarraldo. *Is there any connection?*

Nothing, it's so different. I suspect that when Herzog wrote *Fitzcarraldo* he knew about the book *The Emperor of Amazonas.* My adventurer goes to work in 1899 as a mercenary for Brazilian farmers who are at war with Bolivia for ownership of the virgin forest plantations. He wins and gives himself the title of "Emperor." His first order is to have a castle built for himself. The first thing that arrives for construction of the castle is the staircase. He is so anxious to see his castle built that he puts the staircase in the middle of the jungle. Then he puts his desk and his table at the top, and rules from the top of an Italian marble staircase in the middle of the jungle.

A kind of surrealist comedy?

It's a tropical delirium, very different from a comedy. All the things are real, but you don't believe that this kind of reality can exist.

What is your other project?

It's based on a book called *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* by Manuel Puig, an Argentinian who lives in Rio now. The story is about an old homosexual who lives in Rio de Janeiro, an ex-American sailor who left his ship in 1947 and lives in the port and works in a bar. At a small table he writes letters for prostitutes and other women of the port who want to write their husbands and fiancés and sailors around the world. He writes their letters in English and they pay him. He's a wonderful character with all his fantasies in Hollywood during the fifties.

BRUCE KAWIN

Time and Stasis in *La Jetée*

Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962, released 1964) is identified as a "*photo-roman,*" a photograph-fiction, a term that readily evokes its complex narrative strategies. The visual track consists primarily of still photos connected by straight cuts, fades, and dissolves; the editing rhythms and the variations in camera position are so like those in conventional "moving pictures" that the spectator may feel s/he is watching a movie rather than a comic book, and this impression of flow is reinforced by the sound track of the film, whose music, sound effects, dialogue, and voice-over commentary move along at a normal rate. Though the images seldom move, the film has duration and the impression of proceeding. The commentary—the "roman" element—is continuous and self-conscious; the nameless hero is "the man of whom one is telling the story." There is more movement than fixity in *La Jetée,* but the overall impression it leaves, the first thing anyone says about it, is that it consists primarily of stills. It is a reasonable assumption that the world of the story—rather than the world of the narration, or discourse—is one in which conventional movement occurs, and that the stills are an aspect of the story-teller's vantage point outside the diegesis. Run to earth, what this implies is that there is an apparent difference between event time and film time that vanishes into a systemic understanding of first, the stasis of the accessible instant, and second, the ways consciousness transforms what it observes and

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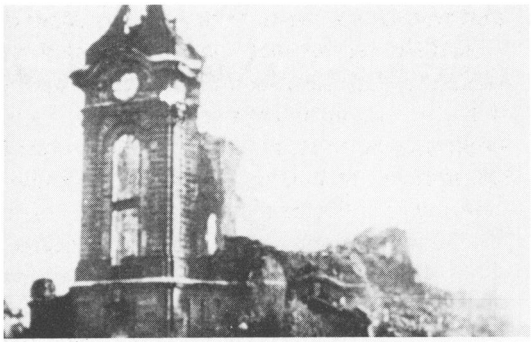
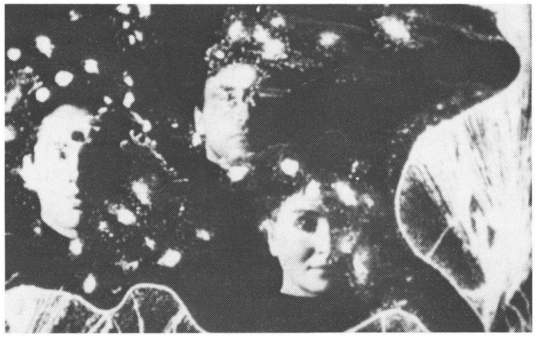


what it presents. The narrator's summation, that "one cannot escape from time," might without distortion be rephrased "one cannot escape from film."

The film's title refers to the large "jetty" or pier-like structure at Orly airport outside Paris, where the hero, as a boy on a Sunday shortly before the third world war, sees a man killed and is strongly impressed by the face of a young woman who also observes the event. As an adult, imprisoned in a postwar underground camp, he continues to dream of this woman and is selected by his captors to participate in an experiment in time travel. Through a combination of drugs and self-hypnosis he is eventually able to live in the past he so vividly imagines. Like a ghost or a demon lover he appears to the woman at various times and places, until the satisfied experimenters send him on his true mission, which is into the future, from which he brings back a power source that will allow the human race to get on its feet again. Before



the scientists can liquidate their romantic "tool," the people of the future help him return once and for all to the world before the war and to the woman he loves. As he runs down the jetty to join her, he is killed by a man from the prison camp staff (who have had time, of course, to perfect their methods) and realizes that he is the man whose death he observed as a child.

His is not the "jeté" of a dancer—that word is masculine—but that of a projectile, something thrown (from the verb "jeter," to throw or cast), and its symbol is the jetty or concourse. Because time is often described in this film as a series of waves, it is significant that "la jetée" can also mean breakwater, something that extends or projects into the sea. To leap, to make a single weight change or step while in the air, is just what he can not do; that would be to escape from time, to cheat destiny, to escape narration. He is not a leaper, but someone who is thrown. He has found, in the "air," no real freedom, no defiance of gravity. And yet this romantic apotheosis is what the film somehow suggests, in the transfigurative moment when, at the center of the film, an image of the woman does move. That moment is presented as being perhaps an invention or a dream, and it is set apart from the stasis of the rest of the film, which is another way of saying that it appears to be set outside time. "Le jeté" is the romantic aspiration, "la jetée" the political and scientific set of limits. Fantasy, love, and movement are escape; what is real is the sequence of instants, which are static and which are subject to control.

Time travel depends on the notion that all events are somehow present, that from some viewpoint exterior to what we think of as temporal continuity (one instant after the other) all instants are simultaneous. One of the simplest and most convincing images for this concept of time is the reel of film. On the reel, thousands of frames maintain their images of *potential* instants, all together and retrievable. As the film moves through the projector, the images become "present" or *kinetic* (the root of "cinema"); they give the impression of "happening now," which is the time of projection ("jeter" is the root of "projeter," to project a film).

There is an important difference in this film between memory and time. The hero is not sent into his memory; rather his memory is used as a force that helps him to re-enter the past. When in a peacetime garden, for instance, he "remembers that there were

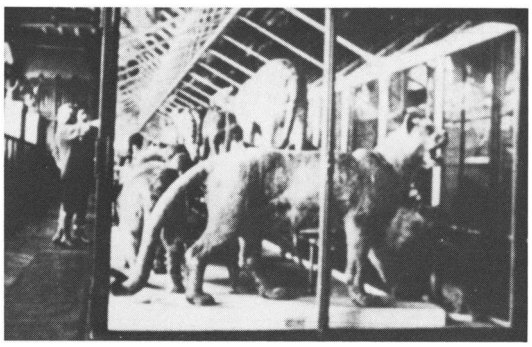
Frame enlargements courtesy of Bertrand Augst.

gardens," the subject is not reverie but actual time travel, and his memory functions equally well in past and present times. Over the first shots of the woman's face the narrator says that "moments to remember are just like other moments," and that line is a key to the film. All time is presented, has to be presented, in the same manner; any instant is capable of being remembered, or of being presented as a memory. A memory and an event, then, have to share the quality of being present and storable; presenting and retrieving must look the same. Any instant is a frame, and any frame is capable of being projected or waiting on the reel without changing its nature. The present tense of consciousness is projection, the activity of the projector. For most of us, the projector runs only forward and is outside our control; for the time traveller in this story, whose consciousness can select which frame will be present, the sequencing of instants appears to be less deterministic, until one remembers that all the frames remain in place on the reel and that in the hero's beginning is his end.

Bur our reality is not composed of stills; even the instant is a mental construct, for as Bergson observed in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* the most simple movement consists of an *infinity* of smaller movements. To chop a flow into discrete elements is the activity of analysis; to move, or to be inside the flow, is the province of intuition. Just as to speak involves chopping a thought into the fragments of words, to shoot a film involves chopping a movement into frames; it is the job of syntax and of the listener to reassemble the words into a complete thought, and the job of the projector and the audience to reassemble the frames into an impression of movement. The complete, the undifferentiated, the perfectly flowing, and the ineffable are all outside the process of signification, which is analytic; it is intuition that renders these absolutes of flow accessible to consciousness. And it is one aspect of a vision of the ineffable that one remains unable to express or analyze the vision; from the perspective of language, there is no escaping from language. From the perspective of a frame of film, there is no escape into movement. And all of this is the point of the woman's moving, because it is love that allows the hero to leave analysis and enter intuition, to have a vision of process that transcends the sequence of stills. And this is also the reason that that movement is presented as perhaps a dream: a dream, because it is not like ordinary reality, and perhaps a dream, because there is no way to analyze an intuition. Love and intuition are processes of entering into the being of the beloved, even if the beloved is a simple movement of the arm.

But film is not reality; film does not move; film is a sequence of stills whose relation to movement is entirely potential and fantastic. It can present any instant, regardless of whether that instant is "earlier" or "later" than the "narrative present," because it makes any instant be the narrative present. In this respect it is like a book, any of whose words becomes present as it interacts with the reader's consciousness (i.e., the read word is in its instant rather like the projected frame, and the reader's attention like the interplay between viewer and shutter mechanism). The closed book is like the reel in its can, or like the temporal universe viewed from the extratemporal vantage point of God or Godot, take your choice: Godot because he can send his emissary into any Act, One or Two, for what will always be the "first" time, and God because it is possible to consider time and space as mutually causative and perfectly interlocked, so that the temporal universe is a "place" where things "happen." This is one reason that intuition and not analysis can claim to touch the absolute, and that any filming of any movement will inevitably be analytic rather than synthetic.

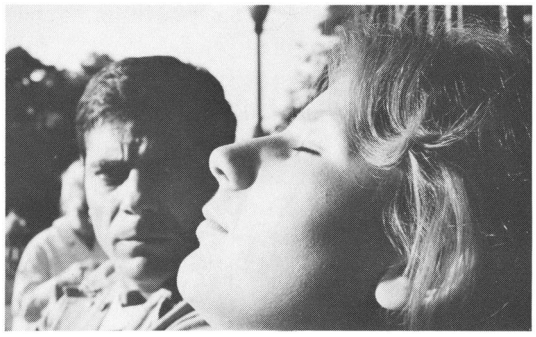
Throughout *La Jetée* there is an overwhelming imagery of stasis: statues, stuffed animals, stills. Over a sequence of statues the narrator says that "other images appear, merge, in that museum which is perhaps his memory." The stills in this film are of course very much like statues, images fixed by the attention of the



artist and the process of the medium. The longest meeting of the lovers happens in "a museum filled with eternal creatures"—stuffed animals and skeletons. A shot of a stuffed animal and a shot of a character do not appear markedly different in this museum which is perhaps his memory and certainly this film; all of the images are fixed and are calculated to give the impression of life while insisting on the fact that they are images, art, statues, the product of the interaction between life and the attention of the artist—the medium as Medusa.

The reel of film is the museum full of stills. Film arrests. This is surely the point of Marker's having shot the scenes of the underground prison camp in the basement of the Palais de Chaillot, which is where Langlois set up his

great Cinémathèque. (He also cast Jacques Ledoux, curator of the Brussels cinematheque, as one of the time experimenters.) There are fragments of statuary in the dark corridors, one of them clearly marked "head of the apostle." Most of the statues that appear under the remark about the museum of his memory are headless; the last is simply a head, and it is replaced via a dissolve with the head of the hero, making it clear that he and his memories are subject to similar qualities of fixity in time while suggesting rather bitterly the absence of a Savior. The hero must escape from destiny, from time, from the accessibility of the frames in their potential stillness, and even from the controllers and accessors of the frames (the cinémathèque as prison camp). His escape route is the romantic imagination: "Moments to remember are just like other moments. They are only made memorable by the scars they leave. The face he had seen was to be the only peacetime image to survive the war. Had he really seen it? Or had he invented that tender



moment to shield him from the madness to come?"

From the very start, the hero is unsure whether his beloved exists as more than an image. The world of the image is the world of time, the museum of accessible stills. The images are entirely real: "On the tenth day, images begin to appear, like confessions. A morning in peacetime. A bedroom in peacetime, a real bedroom. Real chidren. Real birds. Real cats. Real graves." The real birds, seen in flight, do not move. The only thing that moves is the beloved, waking in bed. The implication is that she is, in that moment, either not real or not real in the way everything else is real. The narrator says: "She calls him her ghost. . . . He is never sure whether he seeks her out or is sent, whether he invents or dreams." The image these lines introduce, of the woman in bed, is more grainy and soft than the rest of the film. At first the sequence is silent. There is a dissolve from one still of her sleeping to another still of her sleeping. Then there are more dissolves, and one begins to hear the sounds of birds. Soon the dissolves are between stills that are very similar to each other, as if each dissolve bridged a painfully slight movement between still positions. The birds become very loud. It is as if she, or the film, wakes up. She opens her eyes and blinks. The hero is suddenly back in the camp and his eyes are squeezed as if he were not sure whether he had been dreaming.

It is important to note, first, that the woman is presented here, as at the start, in a marginally hypothetical and romanticized manner. She may be his invention in the first place (though we find she is not), and her moving may be a dream. It is a dream of escape from stasis, a dream of movement. To escape from time would be for him to join her in a world where they could move, or where their love

would feel as transfigurative and transcendent and romantic as movement would be when compared to a world of stasis and doom. That would be the dream of the leap, of intuition. The second thing to note is the way that her movement is achieved, and this is where the film becomes most simple and most brilliant. It is as if her stills came in quicker succession. The dissolves bridge the positions so slowly that one can almost see the still image change position while one knows that it does not. The intervals become shorter, the positions nearer to each other. Finally, the positions succeed each other

at the rate of 24 per second. No dissolves are necessary. The characters and the audience advance together, 24 positions per second. That is normal cinematic movement. But it is not true movement, only the as-if-real succession of selected instants. If one thinks about it in these terms, it is clear that *La Jetée* does not actually break its own rules: there is always fixity, but sometimes that fixity behaves like what we call movement or process. The hero's love has allowed him to enter the being of the beloved or of love itself, to escape analysis for intuition, *perhaps* to transcend the system. But it is only a perhaps because this remains a film, and the movement is simply the more rapid succession of stills. Marker gives us and the characters the impression of a romantic apotheosis—however understated, which is of course why it is so powerful—without actually letting anyone out of the Medusan trap.

The proof that this interpretation of her movement as a bridging of stills is valid comes at the end of the film, when the hero attempts to run down the jetty to the beloved. The rhythm of the editing quickens. The hero's running is presented in a sequence of weight shifts, one still per leg movement, and the shots' durations are approximately those of actual running: one weight shift per cut, and the cuts regular and rapid. The impression this gives is one of turgidity and of an intense attempt to break into movement. But his stills are separated by straight cuts, not joined by dissolves; they do not come close together, as do those of the woman in bed. But he tries. (The character, in event time, is doubtless actually running, while feeling that he might escape from destiny; once presented in the medium of film, where film and time and destiny are so metaphorically interrelated, the symbolic impression is that he cannot break into continuous movement but is locked in a series of stills.) It is then that he realizes "one cannot escape from time." And if the romantic imagination appears to be a way out, there is no way to put that escape on film (her movement must be presented as a sequence of stills).

One thing this suggests is that film cannot escape from its own processes and procedures and that there is something inherently oppressive about the controlling of reality via image-making (an interpretation that would link *La Jetée,* perhaps with too much facility, to Marker's SLON films and to *Far from Vietnam;* a simpler link can be found in *The Battle of Chile,* where Marker calls particular attention to a shot of someone's firing directly at the camera, a shot in which the cameraman "filmed his own death"). Another—if not opposite—construction is that any romantic or intuitive communications that do occur do so by transcending their medium, so that "la jetée" can only hint at "le jeté" as the projector's advancing of our consciousness from frame to frame can only suggest the independent leap from here to here.

All of this is reinforced rather than contradicted by the continuous flow of the sound track and of the voice-over narration, because these too are characteristic of the physical medium. Although the visual track of a film consists of a series of frames which have to remain still while the light passes through them and the shutter is open, the sound track must flow smoothly past the photoelectric cell or magnetic head. Film is a medium in which movements are capable of being arrested but sounds are not. We have no concept of a fixed sound, and it is in trying to imagine a sound that is not a series of waves hitting the eardrum over the course of time that we come squarely

up against the problem of conceiving absolute stasis. If the hero's problem is that he cannot escape from the medium and from the mortal consciousness that surround and determine him, then the continuity of the sound track and the stasis of the shots—which both singly and together signify the processes and systems of sound film—oppress him equally. It is not just the image track that arrests him, but the whole medium of sound film, which is itself a symbol for the activity of consciousness and narration as well as for the nature of time. This is not just a reflexive paradox in which a character in an artwork finds himself unable to escape from the laws and nature of the medium; it is that, of course, but there is more going on than an essay on the problems of characters in artistic systems. It is also an essay on the limits of mortal consciousness and on the relations between politics and transcendence, an essay on the nature of the romantic

temperament in a world that seems always to be on the verge of war. It is about the attempt of the loving consciousness to reclaim the sane world of happiness and commitment in the face of those controlling and destructive forces that live underground with statues and that can extend themselves into the brightest of Sunday mornings to demonstrate their control in their favorite language.

TERRENCE RAFFERTY

The Paradoxes of Home:
Three Films by Walter Hill

Walter Hill's latest film, *Southern Comfort,* is a relentless thriller about a group of Louisiana National Guardsmen who—through a combination of bad luck and arrogant stupidity—find themselves lost in the swamp with a bunch of angry Cajuns hunting them down. It's a simple plot, and the structure is rigorous: the action begins just outside the swamp, as the men gather for their assignment, and ends when the group's surviving members are rescued. It's a film whose disturbing power is anything but simple, though, partly because it can be read as a parable of the American experience in Vietnam, but mostly, I think, because *Southern Comfort* is about the difficulty of finding home—and the awful necessity, once it's been found, of defending it.

"Home" has, in fact, been the overriding theme of Hill's last three movies, and its working out has become more detailed, more ambiguous, with each version. *The Warriors,* his 1979 adventure story about a teenage gang fighting its way back from the Bronx to its own home turf in Brooklyn, provides the prototype for the concerns of *The Long Riders* and *Southern Comfort.* The film's opening presents a radical image of urban diversity, as gangs from all over New York City board the subway for a huge gathering in the Bronx. Each group announces its identity in dress and attitude, some flamboyantly costumed, others united by race or ethnic background—each *exaggerating* itself, celebrating its differences from all the others. They're all gathering to listen to Cyrus, the charismatic leader of one of the black groups, who tries to convince the crowd that wars between groups are destructive, that all the gangs should band together as a kind of guerilla army against the common enemy, the police. As Hill's camera pans over the restless, outrageously diverse crowd, Cyrus's vision seems absurd: division, not community, is what the gangs are all about—if it weren't for the battles, if it weren't for each group's aggressive assertion of its own identity, the gangs wouldn't exist at all. The gang back-

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THE WARRIORS *(Paramount)*

ground is a rich metaphor—both for the teenager's struggle to establish a strong identity, and for the ethnic and economic fragmentation that characterizes large cities—and Hill uses it ironically. Cyrus is killed in the middle of his speech, the unity gathering ends in a wild melee, and rumor (false) spreads that the Warriors, a Brooklyn gang, are responsible for Cyrus's death. *The Warriors* moves then from the initial premise—Cyrus's doomed attempt to unify the gangs—to the Warriors' perilous journey back through the subways and the streets to their own home ground; and the journey functions as a series of tests of the gang's real cohesiveness.

The journey functions, too, as a structure for a series of vivid, crisply edited action set-pieces, each an encounter with a gang the Warriors are invading on their way back home, and each a neat, self-contained sequence, separable from all the others. Hill's films are all, to a degree, structured in this way, but none more rigorously than *The Warriors:* fragmentation and division are his subjects here, so he divides his narrative into discrete fragments. And the episodic structure has the effect, too, of strengthening our image of the Warriors themselves as a group with a genuine identity—they're the only real visual and narrative constants in the diverse scenes that make up the movie. Hill is, after all, just as interested in the Warriors' unity as he is in the city's fragmentation, and the gang's fundamental cohesiveness is what makes this seem his most optimistic film. Visually, the Warriors are the *least* distinctive of the gangs we see: they're racially mixed, they don't have a uniform, they're not one of the large, powerful gangs—what binds them is their friendship, their loyalty to each other, and the Coney Island whose streets are really "home" to the Warriors after their all-night journey from the Bronx. Their unity as a group, though territorial and limited, seems more convincing *because* they're diverse racially and ethnically, and because they haven't objectified themselves in the self-conscious differentness of the costumed, stylized gangs. But even when the Warriors finally make it home, their battles aren't over. They've been followed by the Rogues, whose psychotic leader is actually Cyrus's killer; the Rogues are the ultimate image of the nihilism and chaos which have pursued the Warriors for the whole long night —which, on their home turf (not even the solid

streets, but the sand of Coney Island's beach), they must, and *do,* defeat one last time.

The Long Riders continues Hill's examination of the outlaw group, and intensifies it with the theme of family, and the result is a deeper, more pessimistic vision—almost a tragic one. It's the only one of these three pictures which shows us anything of the individuals' lives outside of the group, and the only one in which the action unfolds over a period of years: it's less focussed, less intense than *The Warriors* and *Southern Comfort,* an elegiac portrayal of the alienated, embattled groups of the other films. All of Hill's groups are like restless, nomadic families, groups of men whose continuing presence in each other's lives constitutes their strongest notion of home. In *The Warriors,* the traditional family isn't even posited as contrast: no one mentions parents, brothers, sisters—the gang kids seem to spring directly from the streets, their connection with each other the only identity they know. But *The Long Riders* is full of families: the James brothers, the Youngers, and the Millers, who make up the gang (and who are all played by real brothers); the Jameses' mother Mrs. Samuel and their retarded half-brother; Jesse's wife Zee, and Jesse, Jr.; Frank's wife Annie—even Jesse's killers are the brothers Bob and Charlie Ford. The outlaw "family" seems very natural in *The Long Riders,* because the family is the deepest, most stable value in its characters' culture.

The Long Riders suggests that the James Gang's outlaw status is, paradoxically, a product of their fierce attachment to family and land. Although the movie picks up their story in mid-career, the Civil War seems to lie at the root of their alienation: they all fought for the South, and the Jameses in particular are committed to the defense of their land, the agrarian ideal. One of the things that makes this an unusual Western is that the outlaws are accepted members of an established community—where they've grown up, where they still have family, where they get married and go to dances. The motif of the outlaw who's tired of life on the run and wants only to settle down isn't a new one, but the special poignance of *The Long Riders* is that the outlaws come *from* a place that they feel very deeply attached to—and that their too aggressive defense of their home is precisely what makes it dangerous, even impossible, for them to settle down in it. Hill doesn't sentimentalize the James Gang by seeing them purely as victims of the North's aggression during the Civil War and the Reconstruction, but he does see them as products of a thwarted impulse toward local autonomy—the particularity of home. The bland, round-faced Pinkerton man who pursues them (he's a Northerner, but seems not to come from anywhere) represents not only an abstract justice, but also an impulse toward social homogeneity which is directly opposed to the gang's values. Hill sets his narrative in a moment of transition—between the radical division of the Civil War and the full re-establishment of the Union (which has, emotionally, perhaps still not been fully achieved)—and in a border state, Missouri, one which the war divided against itself. The rural community the James brothers come from is a strong, cohesive group whose very strength has made it alien in the larger context of the Union, and whose defenders have become so violent, so criminal that they've excluded themselves from the very life that they're defending.

What they wind up defending, really, is the gang itself, which has—through the danger and violence of its means—evolved from an instrument to defend an institution into a kind of institution in itself. The first significant event in the film, after the opening bank robbery, is the banishment of Ed Miller from the gang—a decision even his brother Clell agrees to, since Ed's trigger-happy panic under pressure endangers the survival of the whole group. In a group as hunted and embattled as the James Gang, it's not surprising that group survival become a higher value than family loyalty. But the reversal of value goes beyond the purely pragmatic. Later on, after the Jameses' retarded half-brother is killed by Pinkertons in a botched raid on Mrs. Samuel's house, Ed Miller is the only mourner at the funeral who's not carrying a gun to protect Jesse and Frank; he says he "has no quarrel with the Pinkertons." His resentment transcends his community loyalty—as if Jesse were a cruel father who'd rejected him. The family values hold up for the rest of the film—Cole Younger's rescue of his younger brother Bob is a stirring image of loyalty and courage—but the threat of dissolution established in the first

Escape from Northfield: THE LONG RIDERS

scenes is never quite erased. In the end, it's the outlaw family that dissolves, when its members become too dangerous to each other: Jesse and Frank leave the more badly wounded Youngers in a forest outside Northfield. And the final casualties are the new families that Jesse and Frank have been trying to build: Jesse is killed in his home, leaving a widow and a fatherless son, and Frank trades his freedom to the Pinkertons for the chance to give his brother a proper burial.

Family is a strong value in *The Long Riders,* but the characters seem to see it as a dangerous value, one which makes them vulnerable; home is what they want, but for each of them it's something he has to defend alone, without the outlaw family to support him. Their attitudes are confused, ambivalent, so in the course of the film we see the gang gather, split up, regroup, and split again. Although Jesse and Frank, the leaders, are clearly determined to root themselves—they have wives, farms—the rest of the gang seem rather lost without each other, incomplete. Separation, for them, means safety—but these are all men who aren't very comfortable in the world, who find safety and calm unsettling because their lives have been defined by battle, the state of being invaded, hunted down, shot at. Even Jesse, in his gentleman-farmer incarnation, carries a permanent look of wary reserve. There seems little reason for the decision to rob the Northfield bank—except that it gives the gang a chance to come together again, to redefine themselves as an outlaw family, to justify once again their sense of themselves as an embattled minority, and to do so in an act of symbolic vengeance: this time, *they*'re invading the *North.* The feeling that their long ride to Northfield evokes is a complicated one; it's both inevitable and arbitrary, tragic and absurd, infused with rage, pride, weariness, and a deep sense of loss. But the community of Northfield has its own interests to defend; alerted by the Pinkertons, the unfamiliar town closes around the James Gang like a prison. Like the Warriors in the Bronx, the outlaws are caught off their own home ground, in a community which—like every other—is a closed system, committed to self-preservation. It's the most dangerous situation imaginable: while the Jameses and the Youngers *always* feel like aliens in the large context of the developing American society, America, at least, is a large enough place to hide in—but for an alien group in Northfield, Minnesota, there's no place left to go.

The Northfield raid in *The Long Riders* is a great, heart-stopping sequence, and not only because of its brilliantly edited action: it's an explosive culmination of all the complex emo-

tions and tensions of the film. The savagery in these few minutes of film shocks and saddens us because the impulses behind the violence are all, in a sense, legitimate: the community's desire to defend itself; the desire to maintain order and harmony in the newly re-united States; the James Gang's assertion of its family and regional identities. The structure of the situation isn't so unlike that of *The Warriors*—the Coney Island gang off its home turf, in conflict both with other groups defending their own ground and a larger social authority, the police—but that film's garish, expressionist visual style turns the other gangs into caricatures, so we don't really have to take any of those groups' claims very seriously. In *The Long Riders,* all the conflicting interests are taken seriously, so the James Gang's assertion of group identity isn't funny or menacing, it's tragic: the assault on Northfield is more than a tactical error, and more than just the violent defensiveness of an embattled group—it's an act of aggression against a community not very different from their own in Missouri, a perversion of their own deepest values. The gang's sense of enclosure in a strange place and their violent frenzy to escape are overpowering in this sequence; what makes the situation painful and tragic is that, in a real sense, they've betrayed themselves, trapped themselves.

The National Guardsmen in *Southern Comfort* trap themselves, too, though not through the betrayal of anything noble in their values. The film's central irony is that, despite the military ethic (indeed, the necessity) of teamwork and cooperation, this platoon is a purely artificial group, without shared values or a common background. And the swamp, wild and natural and chaotic as it seems to them, is in fact the home of a culture far more cohesive than their own. The vengeful Cajuns here are, like the James Gang and the city gangs in *The Warriors,* committed to the defense of their own turf—even though their "turf" is a swamp, a territory made solid only by the strength of their community. But *Southern Comfort* is unlike the other two films in that we're not asked to *identify* with the Cajuns' defense of their home. The story's not told from their point of view, and they remain elusive, mysterious, and profoundly self-sufficient—they need nothing from the outside, not even our understanding. What makes this film so fascinating in the context of Hill's work is that he offers here a split perspective on the theme of the alien group. Thematically, the Cajuns fit the prototype established by the Warriors and the James Gang: cohesive, territorial, and fundamentally lawless. The Guardsmen represent the larger, mainstream society which was little more than a shadowy, threatening presence in the earlier films, but structurally *they're* the alien group in *Southern Comfort*—they're the ones being hunted, trying desperately to find their way home.

For the Guardsmen as a group, though, "home" isn't a concept with much meaning. We don't learn much about their backgrounds —Cribbs deals dope; Spencer's a "city boy"; Bowden's a high school football coach—and they don't seem to know much about each other (Spencer thinks Bowden "teaches history or something" at the high school, but he's not really sure), but we know that these men couldn't possibly come from the same place. The guard unit in *Southern Comfort* is a reverse image of the prototype fighting unit in American war films, in which a calculatedly mixed bunch of soldiers (a farm boy, a tough guy from Brooklyn, a "college man") are bound by their loyalty to each other and to their distant country. Home is defined as "America" in these films—a precise concept, a very specific place, a little town we all come from. But in *Southern Comfort* all the Guardsmen but one are within their own home state (the "outsider" Hardin is from across the border in Texas), in an organization designed to serve as its defense—but they distrust each other, fight each other, even kill each other. And they treat their fellow Louisianans, the Cajuns, with aggressive contempt: they casually appropriate a Cajun boat; fire blanks at the boat's owners as a "joke"; and after the Cajuns have responded to the joke by killing the unit's leader, the Guardsmen seize the first Cajun they come across—beating him, tying him up, and burning his cabin, without bothering to find out if he was really one of their lieutenant's murderers. These men may call Louisiana "home," or, in the course of the film, define home as anyplace outside the swamp they're trapped in, but they act without the common moral or social principles that would give the concept meaning.

SOUTHERN COMFORT

And when the two survivors emerge at last from the swamp, what they see—what the camera sees—aren't human faces but machines, a helicopter which bears on its side the film's final ironic image of "home": a white star, the insignia of the National Guard, an institution whose ethic of teamwork and cooperation has turned out to be illusory—whose emptiness has proven to be the *real* enemy.

Although the Guardsmen's failure as a group is largely defined against the cohesiveness and ingenuity of their antagonists, the film never explicitly takes the Cajuns' point of view. The Cajuns' scrutiny and judgment of them remains implicit, and Hill further complicates the film's moral perspective with two very different characters who judge the group from within: the protagonists (and the only survivors) Spencer and Hardin. They're the most likeable members of the unit, if only because they seem the most reasonable and intelligent; neither sees much point in provoking the Cajuns, nor in exacting any kind of revenge which would endanger their own lives. But their attitudes toward the behavior of the rest of the group are very distinct. Spencer's perspective, essentially, is that of an easy-going insider. He's from New Orleans, he's been with the unit for a while—he knows his fellow Guardsmen's flaws and accepts them, just goes along and tries to make the best of it, without trying to change anyone very radically. He gets by on tolerance, adaptability, and charm. We sense his intelligence, his judgment of his comrades, but we also sense his reluctance to *act*—he won't take charge of a situation because his instinct is to fit in, to smooth things over rather than to take command and impose his will. Hardin, too, initially seems determined to keep a low profile, but for very different reasons: first of all, he's new to the unit, an "outsider" from Texas, and doesn't want to make himself any more conspicuous than he has to be. But we feel something beyond that in Hardin's attitude, a real disdain for his fellows and a passionate urge to get the weekend *over* with—to get back to his real life, his wife, his job, before these fools can get him killed. At first, Hardin seems to blend into the unit, so quiet we nearly forget he's there. But when Reece, the only member of the platoon with real ammunition, refuses to share his bullets with the others, Hardin springs into action with shocking speed; he holds a knife to Reece's throat until he gives up his bullets. What Har-

din and Spencer share is a survival instinct that's unencumbered by any other ethic, high or low: the difference is that Hardin's will to survive is born of hardship (he refers several times to the "redneck" culture he grew up in), while Spencer's instinct seems the product of an easy life. Spencer can't imagine *not* surviving—there's nothing to it.

Each attitude has the limitations of its virtues: Hardin's indignation has aspects of misanthropy and paranoia; Spencer's tolerance may also be a kind of moral laxity, and it makes him a little slow to recognize danger. What's interesting is that Hardin—the engineer, the married man—seems infinitely the more upright and respectable of the two men (in our first glimpse of Spencer, he's announcing to the unit that he's arranged for prostitutes to entertain them after their weekend maneuvers), and at the same time infinitely the more dangerous. In their early scenes together, Hardin can't believe that Spencer is shrugging off their comrades' aberrant behavior ("What should we do about it? Tie them up? Kill them? It happened, there's nothing we can do about it now."), but his outrage takes on a more sinister aspect later on, when he kills the redneck Reece—partly in self-defense, but mostly in rage (and when Spencer tries to talk to him about it, Hardin can only say, "It happened"). Although Hill doesn't insist on it, Hardin is clearly a self-made man, an American ideal, and is dangerous as only such a man can be; he's left his redneck origins behind, worked his way up, established a home for himself from which everything outside is excluded, but he still feels like an outsider—he can't let down his guard.

When he and Spencer are finally picked up by a Cajun couple and brought to their village, the two men's different attitudes toward danger are thrown into sharp relief. Spencer relaxes immediately: these are "good Cajuns," they're having a festival, and Spencer joins right in, eating and dancing and enjoying the music. But Hardin's nervous and vigilant; while Spencer takes his turns on the dance floor, Hardin keeps his eyes on what's happening outside, watching the Cajun men slaughter a pig—expertly, almost casually—and watching for the return of the men who have been stalking them in the swamp. Spencer is right in thinking that the Cajuns he's dancing with are "good," that they're not the ones who have been hunting and killing the Guardsmen. But Hardin's right to remain wary: the hunters do arrive, and he and Spencer can't rely on the villagers for help. He certainly doesn't identify with the Cajuns, but Hardin may be the only one of the unit who fully respects them: he knows to what lengths people will go to defend what they've staked out. Hardin, like the Cajuns, is a bit of an alien in Louisiana, and like them, his alienation makes his home the more precious to him. When Hardin defends himself, he knows what he's defending; as he fights his way out of the swamp, he knows exactly what he means by "home."

And what, really, do the others know? Reece and Stuckey, the rednecks, are more interested in proving their superiority to the Cajuns than they are in saving themselves; Bowden has a twisted Biblical sense of justice that's indistinguishable from his football-coach reverence for authority, and that makes him worse than useless in a crisis; and Casper, when command of the unit is thrust upon him, knows nothing but "the book"—standardized responses for a unique situation. Each of them is in the grips of an image of himself, an abstraction, and that's what makes them both profoundly insensitive to the Cajuns and completely ineffectual as a unit. Hardin's a clear contrast to the rest of them: his survival instinct and his fierce desire for home override all his abstractions—even his morality and his sense of justice. Spencer lacks that strong sense of home, but he also lacks a paralyzing self-image; unlike Reece, Stuckey, Casper, and Bowden, he's got nothing to prove. He's also unlike them—and unlike Hardin as well—in that he has an easy, natural sense of group dynamics: his joking and teasing of his fellow Guardsmen, his arranging for prostitutes to meet them at the end of their maneuvers—all of his actions reveal a deep sense of what keeps a group together and functioning. In a way, Spencer's blithe, unself-conscious enjoyment of the Cajuns' festival expresses the very qualities that make him a survivor—just as Hardin's uneasy watchfulness, in the same sequence, reveals the very different quality that saves *him*. Taken together, Hardin and Spencer reflect precisely the characteristics that make the Cajuns so strong as a group: on the one hand, the pure, ferocious willingness to defend the embattled

home; on the other, the camaraderie, the sheer pleasure in community—the very things that make the home worth defending.

The social ease of Spencer and the joyous Cajun festival provide a necessary balance in the harsh world of *Southern Comfort,* a glimpse, at least, of a possible harmony. The Cajuns' harmony can turn violent when it's trespassed on, a reaction that's both savage and inevitable: until the climactic festival sequence, they're seen throughout as figures glimpsed fleetingly among the trees, as if they were a natural part of the swamp, their strangeness and hostility indistinguishable from the environment's—their community is more than a social system, it's virtually an ecosystem, and the Guardsmen seem to have violated the very harmony of nature. By the end of the film, a few of the Cajuns have been killed, but their society remains intact, their harmony barely threatened. The Guardsmen are a different story. Two of them survive, but the *unit* is destroyed, too weak to hold its own in alien territory—without a culture to back it up, or nature, just a uniform and the image of a star.

The Warriors, The Long Riders, and *Southern Comfort* are all splendid action films, so kinetic and exciting that few viewers are likely to linger over Hill's ideas. These aren't films in which the characters debate social issues, or even give very detailed accounts of themselves: the action itself—and the incidental, idiomatic interaction of the characters—embody the themes. And the vision, though ambiguous in each of the films, is very consistent. America, in Hill's films, seems a wholly illusory concept—less a nation than a collection of groups, of self-contained social systems that refuse to be integrated into any larger system. These films share a powerful sense of social fragmentation: none of their characters have to go very far to feel utterly lost, completely alien.

The effects of this fragmentation are complex and varied, but violence is inevitably among them, a violence which Hill treats so dispassionately that it disorients the viewer: for when the characters in these films act (or react) violently, their actions neither condemn them as monsters nor validate them as heroes. Even the initial, pointless violence of the Guardsmen in *Southern Comfort*—seizing the Cajuns's boat, firing blanks at the shore—seems more the result of stupidity and indecision than of deliberate viciousness, and their fate is outlandishly out of proportion to their crimes—a nightmarish joke, the consequence of actions which seemed unlikely to *have* any consequences. (The film is a parody, rather than a parable, of America's involvement in Vietnam: the "military" are only National Guardsmen; their "war" is just a weekend exercise; and the "enemy" is a community within their own state.) Hill engages our sympathy for his characters by rooting them very firmly in a context, both a social context and a physical, strongly visual one—the garish subways of *The Warriors,* the lush Missouri farmland of *The Long Riders,* the clammy, gray-green swamp of *Southern Comfort*—and by making their problems so specific to their time and place, he defuses the audience's normal reactions to their violence. We understand the responses of these embattled groups—what they're protecting and what they're protecting themselves against—so we can't wholly condemn them. Yet we can't fully endorse them, either: their motives are *too* particular, almost parochial, not universalized into a search for justice and right, just the assertion of one group's rights over others'. We understand Hill's outlaw groups, but we understand them by seeing how different they are.

The distance we feel from Hill's characters is like the distance we'd feel from the subjects of an anthropologist's field study: a kind of uneasy respect. Hill focuses on the structures of groups, shows us the individuals' relations with each other, lingers over their weddings and festivals and dances—and, like Spencer and Hardin among the Cajuns, we both join in and remain, warily, outside. His films are about small societies which are so stubbornly self-contained that they're unassimilable into any larger social system, and the films themselves have something of that stubbornness, that refusal to let us all the way in—tight, carefully crafted, essentially modest little narrative systems, each very distinct in its look and its rhythms, and all refusing to stray too far from the conventions of their genres. But without, perhaps, quite wanting to, these films expand when taken together, in an ambiguous coherence: the universal theme that connects them all is the notion of home—the paradox is that all our homes are different.

In the King of Prussia

In the King of Prussia is the working title of a film being made by Emile de Antonio. Its subject is the action of the Plowshares Eight at King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, where Daniel Berrigan, Philip Berrigan, Dean Hammer, Carl Kabat, Elmer Maas, Anne Montgomery, Molly Rush and John Schuchardt hammered and damaged two thermonuclear nosecones and poured human blood over secret documents. It was a nonviolent act. It was also the first act of disarmament since World War II. They were arrested, tried, convicted, sentenced. The film will consist of documentary footage shot with the participants, jurors, lawyers, judge and police, as well as a scripted reconstruction of the trial itself. In it the Plowshares Eight will play themselves; actors will play the judge, the prosecuting attorney, the witnesses, the police and jurors. Real people will be playing themselves in the documentary segments; at the same time, real people will be playing themselves as actors in the reconstruction; and actors will be playing real people.

De Antonio writes:

All of this will be structured together to make a rational whole. The film makes no pretense of objectivity. It is a film of commitment which is entirely supportive of the action of the Plowshares Eight.

The film will be approximately 90 minutes long. A reason for making it is: we want it to be seen all over the world as de Antonio's other work has been. The movement against nuclear, neutron and thermonuclear weapons is strong and growing all over the world. The people as a whole will not be in Iron Mountain when nuclear war comes. They will be dead or slowly dying. All rational politics proceeds from the notion that in order to be political people must first be alive. They won't be if those nosecones are used in the way that the Pentagon, GE and others have planned. We recognize that there are equivalents to GE, Haig and the Pentagon in other countries.

That people play themselves as actors is an aspect of reality not faced in conventional film and television. That world is like Plato's cave where we see only shadows. We live in a shadow world. The shadow on the wall is the dollar sign. That is what *The Deerhunter* is really about, shot like a commercial to make cheap false commercial history. The TV industry piously announced that the Vietnam war was the most televised in history—wrong. It was sandwiched between commercials for mastodonic cars and deodorants so that war and peace, life and death became just another part of the program. Like Walter Cronkite. Our greatest disease is the media, particularly broadcast, whose apparent concern with irreverence is the major way of insuring that we stay in the cave. The most noble and the most pitiful of human activities becomes quotidien as shaving. CBS is worse than GE. It is a way of making us all become irrelevant.

Our film may be under-produced; but it won't soothe you. Our stars don't have press agents, they have passion and strength. The good guys entered private property and hammered away on nuclear nosecones.

THE SELF AND THE OTHER: AN INTERVIEW

THE OTHER: *A hoax. A trumpet blast of self-esteem. Why* are *you doing this?*

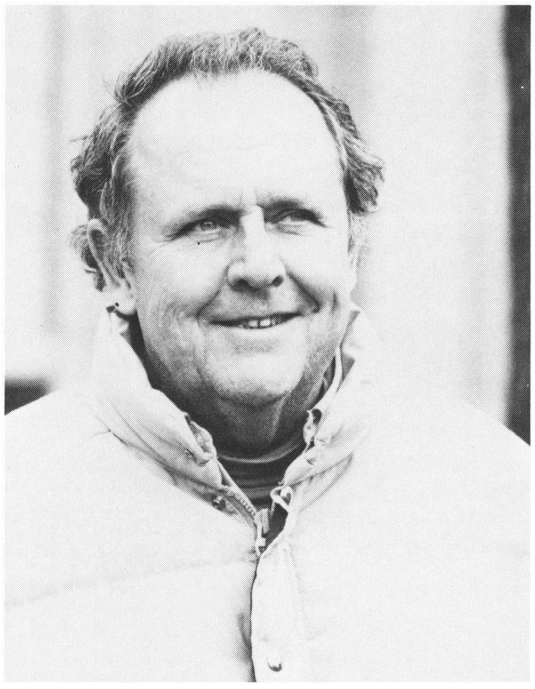
THE SELF: I'm tired of interviews. Journalists lazy. Politicians control them by feeding. Recently an interview with a young man for *Sight & Sound.* He used to work for me. Taped for over two hours. He came back with the transcript. There was only one question. I inserted the others. Interview *vérité.*

But two you's? Neither likely nor desirable.

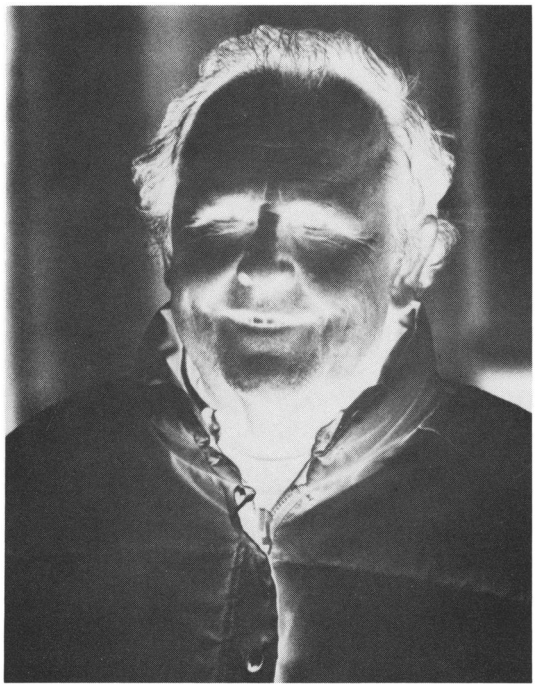
But *we* are here, aren't we? Straighter, isn't it? Communication has become an abstraction. An end in itself. Taught like a dead language. As soon as it's taught, you know it's dead. Like Greek. Dialogue is probably dead, too. The socratic exchange takes place with oneself.

You really want to talk about your new film, right?

What else? Work does begin in a social



THE SELF



THE OTHER *(Photo: John McCarthy)*

context; it also begins in the alone. The social context is the raw material. The working of it is individual. Lenin thought he perceived the uselessness of most art. I would rather be an artist and incur that tomb's displeasure. All governments quite rightly don't trust artists. The lesson is clear. Hacks are simply less untrustworthy. Film is hard stuff. Cimino's latest gumdrop cost more than it did to build fifteenth century Florence. Business resembles government.

And your new film?

The technique is not unknown to Hollywood. An improvisation with shoestrings. Budget is invented as bills are presented, as mistakes are made. Borrow, haggle, planning is pie in the sky. As the film changes, the money changes.

Balls. You love being inefficient and romantic. It's a badge.

Of course, sure. Like other films I've made, I didn't even want to make this one. Paul Mayer of the Catholic Left pushed me hard. I suggested other people.

You're just like a Hollywood hack making a beach boy movie. Put the oats in front of you and off you go.

Maybe, but where I go isn't where they go. My reservations were real. I'm not a Christian, I'm not a pacifist. Catholic pacificism doesn't seem unreal to me now. I was born without religion. I have never experienced it. It was awkward filming martyrs.

How did you manage to lose the awkwardness?

By seeing them as humans not martyrs. Also my egotism, my contempt for war, for the state, for the mastodonic corporations waddling into megadeaths to enrich stockholders. It's pathetic, isn't it? The most beautiful industrial products are weapons.

What else prompted you? Money? Fame?

No, I'm too old to believe they matter. Anger, and the love of the problem. Oh, what a rage I feel when I dream of President Bonzo sucking a jellybean in Iron Mountain looking at the TV show of the death of the world! Even the Id should be fired by that. And the problem. I began the film with the customary innocence of beginnings. Innocence is a device that leads to getting dirty with reality. I sued all the way through the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania for permission to film the trial. It was refused. Secretly, I didn't want it. I hired the best lawyer in Norristown, a wonderful story-teller, Morris Gerber. The idea itself had too much of the stink of *cinéma vérité*. I knew I would have to find a different, better way.

You yourself stink of bourgeois nicety. Did I help you with any of that?

Yes, Iago, you were there. You always are, that unfailing other presence. Although I wrote a script we knew that much of it had to be improvised. The defendants were waiting to appear for sentencing. They could give me two days and two hours shooting time. I almost cut my losses and quit. I came to hate Dan Berrigan's serenity in the face of my adversity. I lost sight of his. The problem sounds like a press release. To make film and theater of a trial by having real people play themselves off against actors playing real people. The moral questions weren't easy. Sometimes the bravest and best are awkward, slow, wordless on camera, hesitating. The actors had to be very, very good.

Wow, a juicy conversion yarn. A book into a film. Middle-aged life-long non-believer finds Christ while filming priests and nuns. An edifying take. Christ!

Don't shimmy. We're off the track now. Of course, I came closer to the *idea* of God than ever before. Not the least of it was due to Martin Sheen who was not only unfailingly professional and very good in a hard role, but exemplary in his spiritual quest. The heat on the set was intense. The cheap industrial air conditioner I had rented failed. 120 degrees. Airless set. Sheen insisted on wearing his jacket (more judicial) under the judge's robes. I loved him.

Love is cheap when people help you. Tell me about your six marriages, all the women you've loved.

I'm given to hyperbole, okay? I *am* a romantic. I probably like the windmills more than the friends I don't have. The other real problem was the filming itself. The Plowshares Eight didn't have time to remember lines. The takes weren't all that short. No time. Very few retakes. The actors did learn their lines. They had to anticipate flubbed or altered lines and cues. Randolph Jones and Richard Sisk were incredibly good and on top of everything.

That praise is self-praise. Rich words for the poor. Why did it take you seven months to edit?

In the shoot, time was beyond price. In electronic editing time is very, very expensive but it can be bought.

You groan too much about money. . . .

Errors can be made to look like inspiration in any editing. Editing is still the heart of the political film. Structure is all. It's what technicians can't do. Electronic editing is over-rated. You can't really cut the work tape. You can't cut what isn't there so you make "build" reels. Electronic editing is writing, writing, writing. The machines are really slower although they move faster. You can't stop on a frame like a Steenbeck does.

I like what you said about artists being unreliable. If I ran the state I would shoot all those I couldn't use. Then I would use all those I could and shoot them afterwards.

You're always a braggart. I'd rather talk about the electronic image. First of all, it's really not very good. It lacks depth and richness. Film may be dying, perhaps, but it's a mature technology, the new Fuji and Eastman stocks are very good. It's as good as film is going to be. Tape is developing but it isn't here. Given that it was tape, Judy Irola and Julian Abbio shot it beautifully. The technicians monitoring in the TV truck couldn't believe it. Yet it was simple enough. I hired Judy because she had no TV experience. TV camera people are insects with headsets who inch along on command. I wanted a freer kind of shooting. Judy and I planned the shots with the script I wrote, which was followed carefully. We were never sure we could actually film all I planned. And we didn't. Not enough coverage, not enough reverse angles, reaction shots, etc. Judy and I did not wear headsets. The technicians in the truck screamed but not anything I wanted to hear. Judy produced great rack focus, pullbacks, motion.

Tell me about the money?

I used to be adroit at raising money. No longer. I used my own. I'm broke. On the lecture circuit I used to quote Mann: every artist is a con man and very likely a criminal. *Felix Krull.* I'd rather be a con than make money doing commercials and industrials for IBM & ATT like the Maysles. I used to con others. Now I have a more sincere problem. I have to pay back myself.

You're self con?

Maybe, but I doubt it. Money is the critical problem unless you make home movies like Mekas and Brakhage. I tried every source. Liberals oppose atomic war but they oppose it cheaply. People with money don't necessarily

want safe investments. What they do want is the FBI staying away from their doors. The Berrigans and others like them oppose nuclear war with risk and honor. It's not enough to sign a petition. The Berrigans have taken the argument for disruptive pacifism as far as it will go. They risk their hides. Prophetic gestures are needed so that others will do other, smaller acts. But not more words. The press is gray with words, TV anchor men drone on. Our rocket generals and their rocket generals don't read petitions.

And next you'll be wanting the money to make a big Hollywood film?

No, although the size of the film more often than not determines its end. Budgets and films are made by Harvard Business School graduates, not by *auteurs. Raiders of the Lost Ark* is like owning a computer company. It makes images and it makes money and the images are made to make money.

You are willful and impossible; your position, too. Don't you see that in the name of some dead radicalism you make films mass audiences don't want to see for a form which is quintessentially directed to mass audiences? Is yours a theory of the radical aristocrat? Your work isn't sexy; it isn't bloody; your theme is history without Goldwyn. Why do you make them?

It's been said before and even I have thought of it all. I won't belabor it. It was sad that the radicals I knew, even those who did bombings, saw and talked about the kind of films radicals should have not seen by conviction. I never paid too much attention. Most political radicals are as conservative as the old lady from Dubuque in the arts. Visual sensibility nonexistent. They watch TV.

I have to live with that contradiction: if you want films to be made for the reasons they should be made rather than for a mythical box office, then you lose the audience. The contradiction is apparent but not real. Those who own the means of production and distribution truly and instinctively choose poppy rather than reality. It's easier; it pays well.

The real contradiction is technique. Technique has become substance. We are hollow enough so we admire how we do it. The how becomes the what. It is our sin, the modern sin. Technique as an end in itself. The point is to get elected, not to get elected for something. It is why we will have atomic war. The two most effective politicians of post-World War II America are Joe McCarthy and Ronald Reagan. Both were great technicians. McCarthy never read a book; he was a right-wing lout and he reached and convinced more people than anyone of his beliefs had ever reached. His accusations were false and weird. He understood better than anyone anonymous anger. He was part of it. The empty calling to the angry, empty. I think my film *Point of Order* is the only work I know which reveals the toppling of a great demagogue. I explain nothing. That, too, is too aristocratic, would you say? I don't. I think it better that people think rather than be pacified or lulled. More democratic, too.

Much of what I believe about art and film I learned in another form from others: that the pretty is rarely art; that glorious color and great technique do not make great films. The old, worn footage I used in the past became something else. I achieved what I had hoped for: the personal in the impersonal. Faintly Dada that notion. But then I am as much Dada as I am a Marxist, I suppose.

Confession time in a film magazine. Shall I get a priest?

Be quiet. You remind of the Weather Underground. There was in their acts a Dada defiance. And although publication of *Prairie Fire* was important and meant a change of direction it was badly written and unoriginal. The anger of the WUO led to its acts; there was plenty to be angry about. There is. They should have worked to develop a critical vocabulary. Their words were faded, rhetorical, stale. It wasn't thinking; it was parroting. Of course, there are few political geniuses. But Lenin, Mao, Fidel, Ho, Jefferson found, as did Tom Paine, fluency in hard politics.

I'm lost. Are you modest?

Not in any crippling way, but more so than others think. I know I don't have the questions. Some of the answers, perhaps. I do know that in film there must be a belief in possibility which rejects the notion of pablum and poppy for money and forgetfulness. We must opt for the complex and the difficult, for films that don't stroke but challenge audiences.

Do you own stock in Western Union?

Of course, 5000 shares. Jerry Falwell knows that he is selling vulgarity. He is like Holly-

wood. Both are in the communications business.

You're an anarchist, finally, aren't you?

I think so. The icons of authority make me reach for a hammer.

Except our icons.

I love film. So much of it has been created as fast as Edsels and the undertakers have to run after it to keep up their pantheons, film classes, reviews. I have been in documentary because I wanted to be. I never did see documentary as a *gradus ad Parnassum* ever reaching to the Hollywood heights. Not at all. The one isn't harder or better. A letter recently from the man who directed *The Competition.* It was a fan letter. I asked him for money. He didn't answer. I don't know his work. He knows mine. He owes me something. He, like others there, admire the idea of what I do and do what I don't admire.

Do you still have the capacity to learn? Your position seems to be the same.

I think I learn. I have just finished *In the King of Prussia* in one-inch video. I learned through error. I will never use tape again. I have learned that no one will ever live long enough to make the films I want to make.

I want to write and direct a film about millenarians who await the end of world. It doesn't happen. Most continue to believe; they move on to the desert and begin again. They have a strong leader. I've been wanting to do that for 15 years. I want to do an autobiographical fiction film about a young man who experiences a coaltown, Harvard and New York right after a war. I want to do a sad film in a home for retired actors—fiction, a political parable with a love story. A 50-minute film on Eratosthenes and the first accurate measurement of the earth's circumference and what it meant. Nothing. I'm talking and studying with a friend about a woman painter, someone like Popova, in the days of prerevolutionary and early revolutionary Russia, a film of bad ends.

Ideas are never appropriated; we all have them. Except *cinéma vérité* folks who have only technique. I'd like to do a mystery film about a Native American shaman and his past; and also a political murder film; and finally, a film with Martin Sheen about the life of the spirit, about a radical monk. I'm not sad that there won't be time. There never was. I am tempted by too many tugs.

Like this. Have a drink.

May 1, 1982

LUCY FISCHER

Mr. Dummar Goes to Town: An Analysis of *Melvin and Howard*

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—Jonas Spatz, *Hollywood in Fiction*
(The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1969)

Jonathan Demme's film *Melvin and Howard* is a work whose narrative is constructed around an event in contemporary American cultural history: the controversy over the estate of billionaire businessman Howard Hughes. Hughes died on board a private aircraft in April, 1976, apparently without having left a will to dispose of his monumental two billion dollar fortune. On April 27, however, such a document mysteriously appeared on a cluttered desk in an office at the Mormon Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah. Listed among the alleged beneficiaries (which included the Mormon Church, several universities, various ex-wives, relatives, and business associates) was a Utah

wood. Both are in the communications business.

You're an anarchist, finally, aren't you?

I think so. The icons of authority make me reach for a hammer.

Except our icons.

I love film. So much of it has been created as fast as Edsels and the undertakers have to run after it to keep up their pantheons, film classes, reviews. I have been in documentary because I wanted to be. I never did see documentary as a *gradus ad Parnassum* ever reaching to the Hollywood heights. Not at all. The one isn't harder or better. A letter recently from the man who directed *The Competition.* It was a fan letter. I asked him for money. He didn't answer. I don't know his work. He knows mine. He owes me something. He, like others there, admire the idea of what I do and do what I don't admire.

Do you still have the capacity to learn? Your position seems to be the same.

I think I learn. I have just finished *In the King of Prussia* in one-inch video. I learned through error. I will never use tape again. I have learned that no one will ever live long enough to make the films I want to make.

I want to write and direct a film about millenarians who await the end of world. It doesn't happen. Most continue to believe; they move on to the desert and begin again. They have a strong leader. I've been wanting to do that for 15 years. I want to do an autobiographical fiction film about a young man who experiences a coaltown, Harvard and New York right after a war. I want to do a sad film in a home for retired actors—fiction, a political parable with a love story. A 50-minute film on Eratosthenes and the first accurate measurement of the earth's circumference and what it meant. Nothing. I'm talking and studying with a friend about a woman painter, someone like Popova, in the days of prerevolutionary and early revolutionary Russia, a film of bad ends.

Ideas are never appropriated; we all have them. Except *cinéma vérité* folks who have only technique. I'd like to do a mystery film about a Native American shaman and his past; and also a political murder film; and finally, a film with Martin Sheen about the life of the spirit, about a radical monk. I'm not sad that there won't be time. There never was. I am tempted by too many tugs.

Like this. Have a drink.

May 1, 1982

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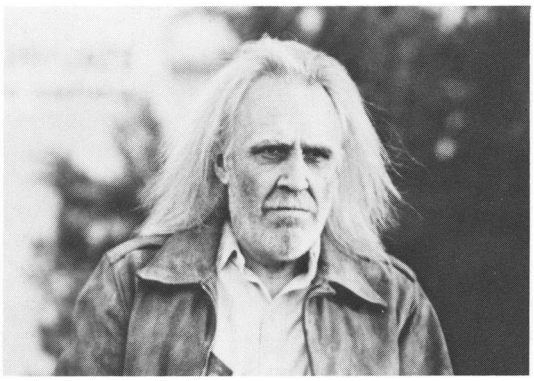
gas-station owner named Melvin Dummar, whose connection to the eccentric tycoon seemed inexplicable and unlikely.

When questioned about his surprising inheritance, Dummar told the press and authorities the following fascinating story. He said he remembered having met a man, who claimed to be Howard Hughes, while driving one night, in December of 1967, in the Nevada desert. He had stopped his car to relieve himself by the side of the road, when his headlights caught sight of a man sprawled out on the ground. "I thought he was a wino," Dummar recalled in a *Newsweek* article.[1] The man asked Dummar for a ride into Las Vegas and, while they were driving, mentioned that he was Howard Hughes. Dummar claims to have totally discounted that statement, thinking that the guy was "drunk, or crazy or somethin'." He proceeded to drop his passenger off at the Sands Hotel, but, before taking his leave, the old codget hit him up for some spare change. As Dummar recalls, "I figured he was a bum, so I gave him a quarter."[2]

When one takes stock of Melvin Dummar's story, it is clear that it reads like a modern-day fairy tale, or an American wish-fulfillment fantasy. Its narrative casts the mythic figure of Howard Hughes—a reclusive billionaire, driven paranoid by his excessive wealth—in an encounter with a middle-American Everyman, while travelling incognito through the frontier desert. Apparently touched by the young man's selfless and spontaneous act of kindness, the tortured magnate admits his true identity, and shortly thereafter, writes the Good Samaritan into his will. As if the drama weren't wrenching enough, the desert meeting reputedly occurs in late December, which places it squarely within the Christmas season.

Obviously, Dummar's story of his encounter with Howard Hughes reverberates with a fair share of the American democratic myth: the ritual journey of a common man from rags to riches. It is precisely the kind of social parable that has frequently inhabited the American movie screen—say, in Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* (1925) or W.C. Fields's *It's a Gift* (1934). To take the point one step further, it might even be said that had Melvin Dummar's story not existed, Hollywood would have had to *invent* it.



Howard Hughes? MELVIN AND HOWARD

In this case, however, the film industry had only to secure the rights as Universal Pictures eventually did—capitalizing on Dummar's tale as an iconic ready-made, a mythological found-object.[3] Many people, of course, claimed that Dummar himself had invented the story, to support his forging of the "Mormon will." And even the final credit sequence of *Melvin and Howard* notes that the document was eventually thrown out of court.

But what is ultimately interesting about the film is *not* its relation to the real, historical events, and it matters little what we finally decide about Melvin Dummar's sincerity or dishonesty. Rather, what is compelling about *Melvin and Howard* is its focus on Dummar's testimony as a "story," as an anecdotal text, and what intrigues us is how Demme chooses to "read" those narrative events. For, be it fact or fiction, Dummar's tale presents a striking vision of America—and provides a handy vehicle for Demme's cultural and cinematic critiques.

But what kind of film is *Melvin and Howard*? Moreover, what is its view of America, and how is that attitude articulated? Essentially, *Melvin and Howard* proposes itself as a gentle social satire—a comic picaresque of a hero who traverses the broad spectrum of American cultural space. Thus, in an episodic narrative, we follow a typical working man, Melvin Dummar (Paul LeMat), through two marriages, several job changes, an adventure with Howard Hughes, and various geographical moves across the Western national landscape. The tone of the film is mildly sardonic—skirting the edge between caricature and drama. Photographed, predominantly, in a long-shot/long-take format, Demme's style is graceful but unobtrusive

—leaving the viewer free to consider the director's more intellectual concerns: an investigation of the search for the elusive American Dream.

Melvin Dummar is presented in the film as a rather average fellow of some thirty-odd years, who has yet to establish a secure niche in the American social order, has yet to get his piece of the veritable pie. Still, the promise of the American Dream lures and obsesses him, and his life is dedicated to achieving the coveted rewards. Through the course of the film, we witness Melvin's various efforts toward success—and each stage in his journey teaches us something about the culture in which he operates.

At certain points, Melvin seems to go the traditional route of hard work—the nose-to-the grindstone routine that is supposed to assure each one of us a car in every garage, a chicken in every pot. Thus, in his conversation with Howard Hughes, during their desert ride, he complains about his numerous frustrating attempts to get the "right" job, including a rejected application at Hughes Aircraft.

Within the narrative itself, Melvin is seen to toil at various occupations: at a magnesium quarry and then at a local dairy. But each work situation leaves him short of his projected goals. Unable to postpone consumer gratification, as the work ethic requires, Melvin wants results fast—and his spending continually outstrips his earning. Thus, while working at the quarry (and living in a mobile home), his van is whisked away by creditors in the early hours of dawn. Later on, when he is renting a barren, suburban tract home, his wife, Linda (Mary Steenburgen) tells him blandly that the car was repossessed again "in the parking lot outside of K-Mart." In both of these scenes, there is a mocking flatness to the dramatic presentation, lending them a tragicomic tone.

But the most sardonic deflation of the American myth comes when Melvin is a milkman for Rockwood Dairy—an occupation emblematic of wholesome work within a small-town American context. Yet Demme presents employment at Rockwood as an entrepreneurial screw-job. Striving to be "Milkman of the Month" (and win a Zenith 190K television set, with a Triple Scope screen), Melvin encounters a series of dishonest moves from his boss that attempt to rob him of his meager prize. Thus, Delgado deducts from Melvin's sales totals certain repairs on his delivery truck, even though the vehicle was clearly defective when it left the company garage. Later, when Melvin complains about not being able to make ends meet, his boss turns to him earnestly and says: "Did it ever occur to you to get up a little earlier?" "I get up at 2:30!" Melvin replies, rather nonplussed.

Thus Demme presents the Protestant Work Ethic as a kind of Sisyphusian comedy: an absurd uphill battle predicated on the deferral of human needs. And we are not surprised (or outraged) when Melvin rejects it in favor of less noble, more hare-brained maneuvers. Clearly, if hard work and effort get you nowhere in the American design, then you might as well put your faith in more chancy, get-rich-quick-schemes. So Melvin turns to the television game show as a way of achieving the success that has escaped him through more conventional avenues.

In one of the more brilliant scenes of satire in the film, Demme depicts Linda Dummar as a contestant on "Easy Street"—hosted by Wally ("Mr. Love") Williams—a program that seems a cross between "The Gong Show" and "The New Treasure Hunt." Enacting a sado-masochistic drama, contestants must perform some "talent act" for the audience, and, if they are "loved" win a chance to choose one of the coveted "gates." Behind the doors may be a valuable prize, or, perhaps, nothing at all.

Demme clearly treats the game show as a metaphor for the dynamics of achievement in American society, where success is frequently a capricious matter of luck, accident, or chance —a consummate gamble. Hence, it is fitting that much of *Melvin and Howard* is set in such locales as Reno or Las Vegas, Nevada, and that the Dummars spend their second-honeymoon night in a tacky casino.

With the ten thousand dollars that Linda wins on the game show (significantly, for dancing to "I Can't Get No Satisfaction") the couple purchase their share of the American Dream in the form of a suburban ranch house. The model they choose is ominously called "The Landlord." But, once more, Melvin blows it by drifting too far into the materialistic fantasy. He comes home one afternoon with a boat and a red Cadillac, and Linda proceeds to leave him for the second time. "That's not just a

Linda Dummar on the "Easy Street" game show

car," he explains to her, "It's *our* car. I used to see cars like that . . . I used to want one; now I got one." "We're poor, Melvin," Linda urges. But clearly resisting the concept, as a violation of American civil rights, Melvin responds, "We're *broke,* not poor." "You're a loser," Linda shouts, while packing her kids and belongings into a waiting taxi cab.

Given this vision of the American success story as a kind of perverse lottery (a contest of winners and losers), the mythic logic of Melvin Dummar's meeting with Howard Hughes becomes clear. Inheriting a fortune, through a serendipitous encounter with a billionaire, seems somehow fitting within the American scenario. It is just another form of the cultural sweepstakes, of the societal game show. Significantly, as presented in the film, even such a fairy-tale occurrence ends in failure for the common man. As Dummar bitterly tells his lawyer toward the end of the film: "You think that Melvin Dummar is gonna get $156 million, or anything like that?" Instead, he must remain content with the fact that during their night ride in the desert, Howard Hughes sang one of Melvin Dummar's dopey, original songs.

In addition to presenting the American Dream as a game of chance, stacked against the average player, Demme also paints a picture of consumer culture as a wasteland filled with objects unworthy of desire. The Dummars live in a world of material kitsch: they reside in flimsy trailers or prefabricated tract houses; they work in strip joints; they watch TV game shows and eat Kraft macaroni and cheese and frozen pop tarts; their kids play with plastic hula hoops and sit in Mickey Mouse high chairs; they attend Christmas parties at Polynesian restaurants and get married at roadside chapels to the strains of Hawaiian music.

Demme's attention to cultural detail is sharp and lucid and it functions as one of his central satirical tools. His mode or presentation, however, is always understated, rather than emphatic, and we simply seem to "happen" on resonant artifacts as we scan the visual or verbal frame: "Amazing Grace," for example, wafts through a Greyhound Bus station as Darcy Dummar goes off to visit her dad. Significantly, however, while Demme fashions a picture of mass culture informed by great irony, he manages to do so empathetically, without a sneering sense of superiority. For Melvin Dummar is seen more as a victim than a fool. If his aspirations are somewhat laughable, they are also pathetic—and Demme questions a society which presents people with such limited and paltry goals. Thus, if Melvin Dummar is seen to covet and fetishize consumer objects he is not mocked for a plebian lapse of taste.

Rather, he is regarded sympathetically as an over-achieving student in the American cultural school.

But finally the richest aspect of *Melvin and Howard* is not its admittedly clever and insightful portrayal of the American landscape, but rather its commentary on the American Dream. Demme ultimately seems less concerned with the superficial traces of our cultural ideology than with the process through which such values are articulated and advanced. Hence, Demme's real interest is in the subject of *myth,* and *Melvin and Howard* can be read for its many allusions to the workings of mass cultural fantasies.

The film, for example, begins on the evening of Melvin's meeting with Howard Hughes—as the old man lies injured in the desert, following a motorcycle accident. When Dummar drags him into his car and sets off for Las Vegas, he affectionately urges Hughes to sing one of his silly original songs. Significantly, that tune is about Santa Claus and his "souped-up Santa sleigh." Throughout the film we are continually made aware of the Christmas season: when Melvin delivers milk to a comically seductive housewife, electric Magi and Kris Kringles are seen to decorate her lawn; and in a scene in the Rockwood Dairy office, "It Came Upon A Midnight Clear" plays on a phonograph.

Through these allusions, a kind of equation is made between the figures of Hughes and Santa Claus. Just as Santa comes in the middle of the night leaving surprising gifts, so Hughes appears "on a midnight clear" and showers Dummar with an unexpected inheritance. Though Christmas legends have a religious basis, they seem uncannily to fit the American Dream—hence, perhaps, our nation's unprecedented commercialization of the holiday and adoption of it into our native cultural mythology.

Another detail from the opening scene seems noteworthy, and offers us a possible clue to Demme's concerns. As Melvin rides along singing his "souped-up" Santa tune, he tells Hughes that he sent the lyrics to the Hollywood Music Company and for seventy dollars got a song.

The mention of Hollywood is intriguing in this context, since clearly one of the foremost components of the American fantasy machine is the cinema—and no critique of the national mythos can proceed without attention to it. But the reference has particular resonance in *Melvin and Howard* that is worthy of exploration.

On one level, Hollywood has always represented an enchanted kingdom, a privileged terrain whose traversal signifies the pinnacle of American success. Thus, even a wealthy industrialist like Howard Hughes felt "compelled" to play the film mogul, producing such works as *Hell's Angels, Scarface* and *The Front Page.* On another level, Hollywood has stood for the manufacture of mass cultural fantasies—the kind that feed Melvin Dummar's and other Americans' dreams. Parker Tyler once called the cinema "the psychoanalytic clinic of the average worker's daylight" consciousness and Hortense Powdermaker deemed it the dream "factory."[4]

Seen within this dual framework—of Hollywood and its relation to our national mythos—*Melvin and Howard* takes on deeper implications, and its intertextual bonds to other works in the history of American cinema become clear.

Privileged in the celluloid canon of the American Dream is the work of Frank Capra—a Sicilian emigré, turned successful Hollywood director—who created a series of films in the thirties and forties that have become synonymous with our national lore: the triptych *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Meet John Doe* (1941) and the postwar melodrama *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). It is above all these movies that *Melvin and Howard* calls to mind, and its place within the American film tradition seems somehow determined by its relation to, and distance from, those earlier cinematic texts. In particular, it is the first and last of these Capra films that seem most fruitful for a comparison with *Melvin and Howard.*

Mr. Deeds Goes to Town opens with a car crash, which is followed by a newspaper-headline montage indicating that a wealthy banker has died and that his will is in question. Ultimately his heir is discovered to be a nephew—an unprepossessing small-town businessman named Longfellow Deeds who likes to write poetry in his spare time. The inheritance comes as a complete and utter shock to Deeds, a resident of Mandrake Falls, Vermont. He leaves town and goes to New York City, where he soon becomes known as the "Cinderella Man."

The immediate parallels to *Melvin and Howard* are clear: both films involve windfall inher-

itances, somehow engendered by a dramatic vehicular crash. The recipients of wealth in each film are unlikely candidates for the event, and are entirely taken by surprise. Both men are, furthermore, characterized as having an amateur poetic bent. But there the similarities end. For while Capra's film dramatically embodies the populist American Dream, Demme's work smacks more of the American nighmare.

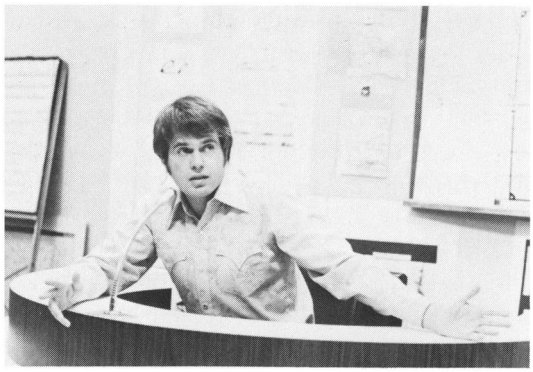
Mr. Deeds (as played by Gary Cooper) is a wholesome folk-figure. His poetry, which he writes in the form of greeting-card jingles, is solidly optimistic and presents a Hallmark Card vision of American life. As a group of New York lawyers pull into Deeds's home town to notify him of his fortune, they come upon a sign sporting one of his rhymes:

Welcome to Mandrake Falls
Where the scenery enthralls
Where no hardship befalls . . .

When he is told of his new-found wealth, Deeds barely bats an eyelash. Content with his life in a New England small town, he has absolutely no interest in money. The remainder of the film involves Deeds's attempts to wrest himself from control by big-city attorneys, society figures and other hangers-on—all of whom want a piece of his estate. Instead, he decides to give his money away to a host of Depression-ravaged farmers—offering them a plot of land and some livestock with which to re-seed the American Dream.

Melvin Dummar, on the other hand, is a different sort of guy. When the unexpected inheritance comes along, it is the crowning glory of a life dedicated to the American hustle. On the day that the will is mysteriously delivered to him by a redneck flunkie, he drives off to the edge of the Great Salt Lake and jumps in the air for joy. Unlike Deeds, he will know precisely what to do with his fortune: he will use it to support his habit as an all-American consumer junkie.

But unlike Deeds, of course, Dummar will never receive his inheritance—either to spend or to give away. Again, the decisive moments of each film (concerning the appropriation of the funds) share something in common: both occur in a courtroom context. In the Capra film, a hearing transpires in which the enemies of Deeds try to prove him insane. But droves of his beloved farmers show up, urging him to speak out in his own defense, and ultimately he wins his case.



Melvin loses again . . .

In *Melvin and Howard,* Dummar stands in the courtroom alone, taunted by a hostile judge. And though he wins that particular hearing, we are told in the closing credits that he will eventually lose the suit. It is no surprise then that Dummar's "poetry" is far more skeptical than Deeds's. On the eve of Rockwood Dairy's Christmas party, he sings an original folk song that speaks of "working like a dog, trying to collect [my] pay." Clearly, to succeed *this* Cinderella Man will have to do more than wish upon a star.

Similarly, the sense of an American community depicted in each film is represented in vastly opposing tones. Mr. Deeds lives a centered existence in Mandrake Falls, and, when it is learned that he has inherited a fortune, the entire town shows up (to the strains of "For He's A Jolly Good Fellow" and "Auld Lang Syne") to send him off. In *Melvin and Howard,* on the other hand, a host of manic vultures descend on Dummar's gas station and he ends up hiding in a tree. To emphasize this alienation. Demme's camera cranes up to Melvin's aerial hiding place, and looks down on the scene from his isolated perspective. In both films the hero's inheritance also sparks an attempted assassination. But in *Deeds,* the perpetrator is a disillusioned farmer who soon apologizes for his lapse of decorum, whereas in *Melvin and Howard* the figure is a crazed, homocidal lunatic who has to be carted off.

There are yet other parallels between *Melvin and Howard* and the work of Frank Capra. In most Capra films the hero suffers a momentary loss of faith and stands at the precipice of disillusionment and depression. At the pivotal moment, however, he is saved from the abyss

by his lover and his community. In *Deeds* that crisis occurs in the courtroom, when the crowd and Babe Bennett (Jean Arthur) convince him to believe in himself and stand up for his rights. In *It's a Wonderful Life,* the epiphany comes on Christmas eve when the protagonist, George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart) faces a crippling deficit in his family's savings and loan institution which threatens to send it under. At the instant of suicide he is rescued by an angel who sends him back to his home, where family and neighbors await with Yuletide cheer, having collected the requisite funds. The angel leaves Bailey with the words: "No one is a failure if he has friends." Thus, the Capra hero is saved by a combination of faith and camaraderie, which, if present in sufficient doses, can insure a "wonderful life."

It is precisely these qualities, and their role in fueling the American Dream, that Demme mocks in *Melvin and Howard.* In one scene—after the Dummars have initially split up—Melvin speaks to Linda on the telephone. She tells him that she has just read a book called *The Magic of Believing* and has realized that their problems stemmed from her previous lack of faith in him. (In other words, she had failed to be Jean Arthur.) They talk hopefully of his going into computer programming . . .

But the best satire of the Capra ethic comes in the portrayal of the TV game show, "Easy Street." For the contestants' success depends on whether the audience "loves" them and their talent act or not. As the MC tells the boisterous studio crowd: "If you love 'em, maybe they'll go on to fame and fortune; if you don't, they'll go back to squalor and poverty row." Clearly, Demme's vision of the American "Easy Street" shares more with the sardonic Chaplin than with the ever-sanguine Capra.

The institutions of love and courtship (factors in the heterosexual American Dream) are also viewed quite differently by Demme and Capra. In *Mr. Deeds,* our hero longs for a passive "damsel in distress," and it is only by feigning to be one that Babe Bennett wins his attention. In *Melvin and Howard,* however, Dummar's second wife, Bonnie, pursues and overwhelms him—proposing matrimony before their first date.

Marriage, too, receives opposing treatment in the work of the two directors. In *It's a Wonderful Life,* George Bailey sees the limitations of the institution, but weds his sweetheart Mary (Donna Reed) just the same. And while he longs for an exotic foreign honeymoon, circumstances intervene, and he settles for a wedding night in a ramshackle local house, outfitted by his friends with posters of the South Seas and a phonograph recording of a song about Wai Ki Ki. Though Bailey periodically doubts his existence as a small-town bourgeois father and husband, on the eve of his contemplated suicide he realizes that he has had a truly wonderful familial life.

Melvin's marriages, though portrayed affectionately, are of a different order. Unlike Mary, Melvin's first wife Linda is not content to live gracefully with poverty and leaves Melvin several times—dragging the children with her. When they remarry, the ceremony transpires to the tune of Hawaiian music (like the "bridal suite" scene in *It's a Wonderful Life*), but Demme's tone is decidedly one of parody rather than poignant romance.

Crucial differences can be found, as well, in the two director's depiction of the domestic landscape. In the Capra film, George Bailey takes pride in his family's savings and loan, which gives people home mortgages. And ultimately he creates a low-income housing development (named Bailey Park) where citizens can purchase property rather than pay rent to the town's evil rich man, Mr. Potter. In *Melvin and Howard,* the Dummars, ironically, live in an updated equivalent of Bailey Park. But here it is represented as a tawdry and vapid wasteland, a view that is emphasized by Demme's dreary establishing shots.

Similarly, in *It's a Wonderful Life,* when the angel rescues George Bailey, he shows him what life would have been like had he never been born. Bedford Falls would have been taken over by the scheming town capitalist, and "Pottersville"—a sleazy community of bars and strip joints—would have risen in its stead. Again, the associations with *Melvin and Howard* are irresistible. For "Pottersville," as depicted in Bailey's celestial fantasy, resembles nothing so much as Las Vegas (or "Hughesville"), a central locale in the Demme film.

Though superficially the work of Capra and Demme would seem to share in a negative attitude toward the mass media, closer exam-

ination reveals crucial distinctions. While it is true that Capra lambasts cynical journalism in *Mr. Deeds* and *Meet John Doe,* his critique is only skin deep. Babe Bennett's newspaper is chastized for its characterization of Deeds as the "Cinderella Man," but by the end of the film that is precisely what Capra has made of him too. Similarly, while the newspaper in *Meet John Doe* is rebuked for its deceptive mythification of the common man, by the close of the film Capra has gone one step further—transforming the American hero into Jesus Christ! Thus Capra's critique of the media is highly unselfconscious, and ignores his own role as a mass-communicator of ideology.

Demme manages a closer match between theory and practice. He satirizes the television reporters who descend upon Dummar, asking him whether he ever thought "a dream like this would come true." And he has Melvin pointedly reject such cheap publicity tricks as manufacturing souvenir T-shirts. But unlike Capra, Demme does *not* reproduce the media fantasy on the level of his own narrative fiction. Rather, the film ends with Dummar skeptical and dubious of his victory. And the final rolling titles seal his bleak historical fate.

In addition to ideological oppositions between the work of Demme and Capra, their films evince radically different cinematic styles. Whereas Capra's films were generally realized in Hollywood's "classical" mode—involving rigorous character and plot exposition, continuity editing, and structures of audience identification—*Melvin and Howard* displays a far more abstract and distanced narrative form.

Unlike Longfellow Deeds (whose persona is clearly established in a long opening scene at his home in Mandrake Falls), Dummar simply appears, without introduction, in the first shot of *Melvin and Howard.* We must then piece together a sense of his character and lifestyle through highly fragmentary scenes of his domestic world and workplace. Demme also organizes the story line in a very dissociative manner—marked by abrupt narrative breaks. Thus, we are introduced to Melvin's wife Linda, in the very same scene in which she abandons him, thereby preventing our clear understanding of their relationship. As she departs, she is picked up by some guy in a car,

Linda leaving the Dummar trailer

whose face we never really see. And in the next scene they argue in a motel, and he storms off. Thus, in merely two shots—of a highly ambiguous nature—Demme dispenses with the entire drama of Linda's affair. Likewise, it is a single cut that separates a scene of the Dummars watching television at home from their appearance on the game show: we never witness their germination of the idea, or their preparation for the event.

Through his sketchy, abbreviated character portrayal and his disjunctive diegetic style, Demme accomplishes not only an abstraction of the narrative but a blunting of audience identification. Rather than being caught up in the melodrama (of personalities and incidents) the spectator of *Melvin and Howard* remains somewhat aloof—able to respond to the story as a satirical tableau. Whereas the audience of "Easy Street" is asked to "love" the performers, the spectators of *Melvin and Howard* are not. They are asked only to view them empathetically as participants in a social farce.

Demme's comic style stands in contrast to that of Capra as well. While Capra's films were essentially romances, overlaid by a rather folksy and sentimental tone, *Melvin and Howard* is more of a satirical picaresque. Thus the comic emphasis is less on a central amorous relationship than it is on the larger social fabric. Hence Demme peppers the film with such ironic bits

as an American Indian (in full ritual dress) who sits in the studio audience of "Easy Street," or a suburban housewife who seduces Melvin on one of his milkman rounds.

At points Demme's sense of caricature is much broader than that of Capra, and verges on the cartoonish. This is particularly true of the performance style of Mary Steenburgen who, as Linda Dummar, seems a cross between Betty Boop and Minnie Mouse. Significantly, her character hails from Anaheim, California, which (as "Mr. Love" points out) is the home of Disneyland.

Though in general Demme's style veers away from that of Capra, *Melvin and Howard* does contain a few "tributes" to the cinematic era in which Capra's films were made. Thus, in the scene of the Dummars' remarriage, Demme uses an anachronistic flip-wipe, and, in the sequence of Bonnie's proposal to Melvin, an iris-out. Furthermore, he casts the actress Gloria Grahame (who played the town "bad girl" in *It's a Wonderful Life*) for a cameo role as Linda Dummar's mother.

Although I have enumerated certain parallels between the work of Frank Capra and Jonathan Demme, I am not claiming any conscious influence of the former on the latter. For though an admission on Demme's part of direct homage would be pleasing, it is not necessary to my critical stance.

For it can be argued that the films of Frank Capra are, by now, a *part* of the American mythos. Having reflected so precisely our national ideology, his work ultimately transcended and transformed it—projecting the American fantasy onto yet another plane. Thus the spirit of Capra's films has become a feature of our cultural inheritance; it is in the American "air," as it were, like baseball or Disneyland. Thus, given Demme's concern in *Melvin and Howard* with the American Dream, he has chosen a subject that can no longer be addressed *without* implicit reference to Capra, especially in the medium of film.

In viewing *Melvin and Howard,* it is difficult to resist meandering beyond the limits of the film and wondering whether Dummar's story is genuine or a fraud. Even that issue seems somehow coded or contained by the work of Capra, who in *Meet John Doe* made a film about a newspaper ruse centering on a phony story about an average American man.

If Melvin Dummar's story was, in fact, true, then he would seem to have wandered into a real-life Capra fantasy—one that had a less cheerful ending than the typical cinematic dénouement. But if Dummar's story was a lie —then perhaps he has executed the greatest tribute to the director's powers. For in fashioning his Howard Hughes hoax, he unconsciously wrote himself into a Frank Capra script.

I began by postulating that had Melvin Dummar's story not existed, Hollywood would have had to invent it. Perhaps, in a way, they did.

—LUCY FISCHER

NOTES

1. Jerrold Footlick (with Martin Kasindorf), "The Hughes Legacy," *Newsweek,* 88 (27 December 1976), p. 63.
2. The information mentioned in this paragraph comes either from the *Newsweek* article cited above or from: Harold Rhoden, *High Stakes* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1980), p. 82.
3. "The Hughes Estate," *Newsweek* (6 November 1978), p. 22.
4. Tyler, *Magic and Myth,* p. 751 and Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950).

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Reviews

TIME BANDITS

Director/Producer: Terry Gilliam. Script: Michael Palin and Terry Gilliam. Photography: Peter Biziou. Editing: Julian Doyle.

Terry Gilliam's *Time Bandits* has emerged as a witty, inventive, and, ultimately, disturbing film from a quagmire of singularly witless, banal, and passive kiddy fantasy-adventure films. The film focuses on the bizarre adventures of an English boy, Kevin (Craig Warnock), who becomes involved with six time-tripping dwarves—the Time Bandits—as they romp through history. The Bandits—Randall, Wally, Fidgit, Strutter, Og, and Vermin—are incredibly sleazy for film-fantasy characters; they are rude, greedy, arrogant, and, more than anything else, dirty. And history, as re-created by Gilliam, is messy, disorganized, and decidedly hostile. There is little in Gilliam's attitude towards the children's film that can be linked with the traditional Hollywood conception. Other current kiddy films, such as Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and Robbin's *Dragonslayer,* attempt to run against the grain of the genre by using heavy-handed violence and gore, but these films are still larks; there is nothing more involved here—consciously—than can be read from the surface. *Time Bandits* could have easily been, like these films, pure puffery, but Gilliam and co-writer Michael Palin use their roots in the Monty Python clan, with its cynical sensibility, to supply other, deeper layers to the narrative. The film does not take itself too seriously, however; its tongue-in-cheek attitude forestalls excursions into the hinterland of pretentiousness, excursions which would have alienated the targeted young audience.

Kiddy films are consistently treated with disdain by film critics, a not inappropriate reaction considering the appalling mediocrity of most of these films. Even the best examples —such as *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the Rooney/Garland/Berkeley musicals, and *Star Wars* (1978)—are noticeably lacking in depth. The recent spurt of pre-teen adventures are significantly different from their predecessors, being characterized by a darker, more fatalistic tone and, in almost all cases, an unsympathetic treatment of the characters; and yet, these films are as empty as their forebears. A myriad of sociological interpretations could be posited to explain this trend, but the brooding, malevolent tone can be attributed largely to the cold, mechanical manner in which these films are constructed. Feeling that the aforementioned Python sensibility helps to distinguish *Time Bandits* from the other current kiddy films, the film's perceptiveness is used here to elicit some of the tendencies of the genre.

As Dorothy is propelled from Kansas into Oz by a passing tornado, and Rooney and Garland, in *Strike Up the Band* (1940), are propelled to stardom by Paul Whiteman, Kevin is presented with the means to escape Surburbia and venture into the fantastic when the Time Bandits blunder into his bedroom. The Bandits, former employees of the Supreme Being, have stolen His map of the holes in the Universe and now plan to race through space and time looting history.[1] Kevin becomes caught up in the Bandits' escape from the vengefully pursuing Supreme Being (manifested as a giant stylized face hurtling through the air) as they flee through his bedroom wall (a curiously placed time-hole) and plunge through space, landing in Italy during Napoleon's conquest, at the Battle of Castiglione. Kevin and the Bandits meet up with Napoleon (Ian Holm), and then Robin Hood (John Cleese). Kevin then becomes separated from his elfen companions, winding up in Mycenae under the paternal wing of Agamemnon (Sean Connery), but the Bandits reappear and steal Kevin from Agamemnon. After a brief interlude aboard the Titanic, they are all transported—through the manipulations of Evil (David Warner)—into the Time of Legends (Evil, naturally, wants the map). In the Time of Legends, they journey to the Fortress of Ultimate Darkness (Evil's lair) in search of the Most Fabulous Object in the World. Once there, they become involved in a monumental battle between the physical embodiments of Good and Evil, culminating in the reappearance of the Supreme Being.

As is apparent from the above synopsis, *Time Bandits* moves from the domestic into deeper layers of fiction. As the immediacy of the historical context diminishes, the major figures become more legendary and, therefore, more symbolic than tangible, ending in a totally

The Time Bandits and their map

fictional era—the Time of Legends—and a battle between two purely symbolic abstract principles—Good and Evil—capped with the dominant fiction of the Supreme Being. Each encounter is a lesson in disillusionment for Kevin, with two of his idols, Napoleon and Robin Hood, portrayed as less than admirable, if not dense, and, while Kevin finds in Agamemnon a perfect father to replace his own ineffectual parent, he is forcibly snatched away by the Bandits. Finally, he meets the Supreme Being (Ralph Richardson), a doting, stodgy gentleman in a business suit, who indifferently tosses off explanations of the horrors of the Universe. The effect of His Olympian hedging upon Kevin's developing moral consciousness is easy to imagine.

Kevin tries to escape within his fictions but they ultimately become more harrowing as the fantasy images come closer to embodying the abstract principles of Good and Evil (synthesized in the figure of an indifferent God) that will make his movement into the adult world so difficult. His parents lead a particularly dismal lifestyle, obsessed with watching television (especially a game show entitled *Your Money or Your Life,* wherein wrong answers are punishable by death), and acquiring new electronic gadgets (including a microwave oven that can change "a block of ice to Boeuf Bourguignon in 8 seconds"). Kevin openly rejects this lifestyle; he instead immerses himself in the lore of ancient Greece, showing an intense fascination with combat ("The ancient Greeks could kill people 27 different ways"). His alternative existence is admirably more assertive and adventurous than his parents' but, without any moral grounding, is no more attractive.

A somewhat leery attitude towards authority figures, society, and the human condition is one of the trademarks of the Monty Python aggregation (which includes *Time Bandit* participants Gilliam, Palin, and Cleese, along with Graham Chapman, Eric Idle, and Terry Jones) and has been especially prevalent in their two most recent films, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) (which Gilliam co-directed with Terry Jones) and *Life of Brian* (1979). Gilliam has been submerged within the Python fold, with the exact nature of his contributions, with the notable exception of his bizarre cut-

out animations, not entirely evident. His first solo directorial effort, *Jabberwocky* (1977), too closely resembled *The Holy Grail* and was obscured by it; but with *Time Bandits* Gilliam emerges as a distinct and diverse talent. *Time Bandits* does, however, bear the mark of the Python philosophy and, along with its innovative visual technique (which is solely Gilliam's domain), it is this healthy cynicism which separates this film from the other *noir*-like kiddy films. Perhaps the most famous (some would say infamous) sequence in *The Holy Grail* is the sword duel between the Black Knight (Cleese) and King Arthur (Chapman), wherein the King hacks off all of the Knight's limbs with the victim feigning not to notice (Arthur: "You stupid bastard. You haven't any arms left." Knight: " 'Course I have. [Eyeing the stumps] Just a flesh wound.") This is a grisly piece of business and it is doubtful whether an American director (with the possible exception of Richard Lester) could have rendered it convincingly and still made it funny.[2] But it is funny, hilariously funny, and it is the Python disdain with human nature that makes it so. In *Life of Brian,* Brian (Chapman) is beleagured by his followers, who are convinced that he is the messiah, and they entreat him to deliver a sermon. Reluctantly, he lectures them on their willingness to submerge their identities within a mob, stating, "You've got to think for yourselves. You're all individuals," to which they chirp back in unison, "Yes, we're all individuals." Once again, an American director would have made hash of this sequence; similar mob scenes abound in Mel Brooks's work but they lack the Python subtlety and resonance.

Thus, in *Time Bandits,* as Robin Hood distributes the Bandits' loot to the poor, one of his thugs clobbers each recipient in the face. In most comedies this would have seemed sadistic, but as Gilliam has explained: "I don't think that's sadistic. Somebody thought it was really about an American unemployment line. You go there, they give you the thing, and then they just bash you. I wasn't thinking of that consciously, but there it is."[3] For a fantasy, *Time Bandits* has few light moments and relies heavily on gallows humor. This would normally be anathema to a children's film, but Gilliam appeals to his audience honestly instead of condescendingly, using images and ideas that spring naturally from Kevin's environment and disposition rather than the typical visions of a candycane Utopia which are the staple of the Hollywood fantasy, visions which would be revolting to a young boy. Avoiding this dream world of vapid, cheery, essentially feminine icons, Gilliam creates a fantastic, grand metaphor of adolescence as a rite of initiation.

The very real concern of *Time Bandits* for its characters sets it apart from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Dragonslayer.* In their headlong plunges from one high-tech set piece to the next, Spielberg and Robbins have neglected to develop their dramatis personae, leaving them stranded—literally—amongst the wreckage of the film-makers' contraptions. And what time *is* spent with the characters involves placing them within exploitative situations which defy logic and plot development. Whereas Gilliam's film-making is reflexive, willing to give the characters room and develop situations from their personalities, both *Raiders* and *Dragonslayer* exhibit a particularly vicious approach to film-making; these films are insensitive, cold, with little evidence that a human consciousness, let alone conscience, was behind their creation.

In an early sequence of *Dragonslayer,* a sacrificial virgin is manacled to a post outside of the dragon's lair. As the dragon emerges from the pit, the girl tries to free herself by yanking her hands through the manacles. With intense pain on her face, she scrapes her hands through, considerably bloodying her wrists. Free, she flees the dragon, who pursues and corners her, rises above her (in a subjective shot from the dragon's viewpoint, worthy of the trashiest misogynist horror film) and kills her with a torrent of fire. Why is it necessary, when the girl is to be killed off seconds later, to show her suffering and the goring of her wrists in such a meticulous, obsessive manner? The girl's plight does not become any more realistic —or sympathetic—by detailing her tortured efforts, nor does this grisly effect spring naturally from any of the concerns of the narrative. Later, the King's daughter is presented in each of her appearances as a progressively more enticing sexual object, only to be shown after her voluntary sacrifice (which the hero could have easily prevented) with the dragon's offspring gnawing ravenously at her limbs. The film's creators apparently have interests which have little to do with developing the inherent

values of the narrative. The same attitude prevails in *Raiders,* where the dispensability of scores of characters (with the notable exception of the hero and the heroine) is the grease which keeps the creaky machinations of the plot running smoothly. Spielberg and Robbins are not being accused of any perversion, aside from a fetish for mechanical manipulation (perhaps the cinema's most prevalent neurosis). They create films which appeal directly to the audience's most basic impulses, striking at common phobias with an optimum of technical accuracy. Short of being wired directly to each viewer's nervous system, their films are cinematic joybuzzers which administer a series of well-timed shocks.

Gilliam is also interested in controlling viewer response, but in a manner which allows the viewer to actively participate in the dynamics of the film, organizing his visuals so that attention is drawn to the action, rather than immediately riveted there. His sets are "busy," showing a wealth of detail, and yet they are so carefully planned that there is no ambiguity as to the focal point. *Time Bandits* is part of a small band of contemporary Anglo-American films that can be considered to be humanist, showing an active concern for developing characters and allowing the plot to develop from these characters. It is the auteur's interest in and empathy for his creations which shapes the humanist film. Gilliam is emphatic about this distinction within the film-text, with his conception of Evil obsessed with the possibilities of high-technology ("God is not interested in technology . . . He knows nothing of the potential of the microchip or the silicon revolution") and Evil, like the whiz-kid directors, is convinced that the power to create and control lies solely in the mechanics of the chosen medium ("And when I understand computers, *I* shall be the Supreme Being"). When, with the map of the Universe finally in his possession, Evil considers how he will revamp Creation, his first goal is to destroy the Supreme Being's conception of man "and wipe clear the scourge of woolly thinking once and for all." And, of course, Gilliam's Supreme Being *is* a woolly thinker, more interested in rainbows and making grass grow than in the new technological dawn, but it is this romantic idealism which sends Kevin on his journey and it is the Supreme Being, flaws and all, who annihilates Evil. Kevin's parents are placed on the side of Evil, appearing with him inside the Fortress of Ultimate Darkness, but they are only ciphers in the computer revolution, not yet conditioned to ignore the incessant urgings of human curiosity. At the film's conclusion, Kevin warns his parents not to touch a piece of Evil accidentally left behind by the Supreme Being, but their distrust of Kevin is so ingrained that once Kevin tells them not to touch it they *have* to—and are instantly blown up. Ironically, this is their only endearingly human characteristic.

Time Bandits treats its origins in Anglo-American mythology nakedly, whereas *Raiders* and *Dragonslayer* are at pains to repress these same sources, covering them with the filmmakers' sterile shadow play. All three films are from the same tradition which produced Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955): the tradition which has established the image of the Good Bad Boy as *the* icon of the American male.[4] The main characters in *Time Bandits, Raiders,* and *Dragonslayer* are essentially children, *young* children; they are also, despite outward appearances, all male. Both *Raiders* and *Dragonslayer* have tomboy heroines, appearing to have been derived from the Becky Thatcher/Natalie Wood archetype (the Good Good Girl); but the traditional female figure rarely acts as the hero's constant companion, which the tomboys do. The heroines of the contemporary films are the heroes' playmates; their gender is irrelevant. (This may help to explain why Spielberg, who has always been lackluster at handling relationships, can make nothing of the Harrison Ford-Karen Allen pairing.) Gilliam avoids the trappings of an artificially imposed love interest by placing Kevin at an age where egocentrism is still considered to be healthy.

Time Bandits is effective because it deals directly with innocence lost, which is avoided in *Raiders* and obscured by the question of lost virginity in *Dragonslayer.* The ideals which sustained Kevin throughout childhood are shown to be meaningless; he is confronted with both the vastness and the emptiness of the Universe at an age when most minds are barely attuned to algebra. His initiation involves a mingling of consciousness: Kevin supplies the settings and the characters, and the Supreme Being supplies the metaphysics. The conjoin-

ing of the two influences is not obvious during the finale in the Fortress of Ultimate Darkness. The battle involves the Supreme Being's conception of Evil against Kevin's forces: cowboys, archers, and knights—in other words, toy soldiers. It is only after Kevin's resources have failed that the Supreme Being materializes to "sort things out." He has stripped Kevin of his fantasies by annihilating all of the paraphernalia associated with them, leaving Kevin to examine, when the dust has cleared, the real significance of combat and death.

Spielberg's Indiana Jones stands in interesting contrast to Kevin. His universe, like Kevin's, is egocentric at the beginning of the film but, unlike Kevin, his situation never changes during the narrative. All of the characters, situations, and forces exist solely for his manipulation, to further advance his thrill-seeking. This egocentrism permeates the film: as in *Time Bandits,* God makes a cameo appearance during the finale of *Raiders,* but here He pops out of the Covenant long enough to tease and then melt handful of insignificant Nazis, and then save the hero and heroine, only to be locked up in US Government warehouse. *Raiders* is every bit as ludicrous—silly might be a better word—as it reads on paper. Its rather bizarre approach to religion would only be plausible, or meaningful, in a child's world. God, once again in the form of Ralph Richardson, is also at the center of *Dragonslayer*'s denouement. Presented in the vehemently anti-clerical narrative as a sorcerer, his true identity is revealed as he prepares to do battle with the dragon. With some suitably majestic conjuring, he rearranges the stratosphere and stages an impromptu meteor shower. Again, as in *Raiders,* these are meaningless acts, but they signify the awesomeness of a benevolent power, or, in adolescent terms, they express the uninitiated's faith in the charity of the adult world.

The recurring presence of the Supeme Being in all of these films holds another, deeper significance. The finale of each film is excessive—in *Raiders,* to the point of achieving visual and auditory noise. Complete, senseless mayhem prevails, with tortured deaths, bizarre mutilations, and rampant conflagrations. The action steps just past the point of relevance, evoking carnage which is disturbing if only for its grotesque proportions. These film-makers are not

Supreme Being scolds renegate Bandit

exhibiting a loss of control or a perverse bloodlust; instead, they are depicting, in an extremely veiled manner, three rather unique apocalyptic visions. Scores of films have dealt with the apocalypse, most commonly in the form of a nuclear holocaust, but Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) has been considered by many to have carried the subject to its illogical conclusion. Few narrative films since *Dr. Strangelove* have openly portrayed the apocalypse in other than exploitative terms. With American society having become progressively more disillusioned, in all sectors, during the last decade and predominant political thought having become conservative or reactionary, a resurgence of Cold War paranoia in the cinema would seem imminent. And the theme of the nuclear apocalypse *has* reemerged, but cloaked in the New Hollywood garb of escapism. With the Anglo-American cinema's best satirists currently silenced by the tasks of raising funds or directing comicbook epics, the responsibility of expressing the greatest cultural phobia has fallen upon those directors seemingly least able to handle it. And as intellectuals—or even interested observers of the human comedy—their value *is* dubious, but it is their lack of pretense, their naïveté, which allows them to act as sieves through which cultural myths can pass disguised but essentially intact.

None of the films discussed here end with their apocalyptic finales. Each film concludes with a reassuring coda—with the exception of *Time Bandits,* which, as will be seen, hedges a bit. These codas, meant to show that the rampant destruction was to a good end, ring false: the common assumption is that the

chances of surviving a nuclear holocaust are nil. Because this assumption forms the cultural level from which the hidden metaphor is experienced, this level of the film-text ceases to exist once the apocalypse has been portrayed; the lighthearted conclusions are nothing more tangible than fanciful conjecture. Only *Time Bandits* partially overcomes this problem by placing the finale and coda on a semi-metaphysical level. The final destruction has occurred, but Kevin's existence has been transferred to a different plane. After first taking the sting out of doom ("I should really do something frightfully extrovert and vengeful with you—but I'm honestly too tired"), the Supreme Being designates Kevin as an archangel, assigned with the responsibility to "carry on the fight." The narrative then takes a wrong turn, returning Kevin to his domestic environment, but even this is redeemed. After Kevin's parents are destroyed (ironically, from Evil "radiating" from a microwave oven) and his home—by implication, his whole environment —is consumed, the camera pulls back, assuming the cosmic perspective with which the film began, returning to the opening celestial graphics, closing with the image of the Supreme Being rolling up the map of the Universe, apparently through with the idea, perhaps going on to a new Creation—perhaps not.

—MICHAEL J. GAUGHN

NOTES

1. About the map: As Bandit leader Randall (David Rappaport) explains to Kevin: "The fabric of the Universe was sort of a botch-up job, to be quite frank. We made it in only seven days. You see Kevin, there are holes in it."

2. While Gilliam *is* an American—the only American in the all British troupe—he has, like fellow expatriates Lester and Kubrick, developed a broader, more European sensibility.

3. Anne Thompson, "Bandit," *Film Comment,* XVII, 6 (November-December 1981). An interview with Gilliam.

4. The discussion in this section is indebted to Leslie Fiedler's analysis of the Good Bad Boy in his "Eye of Innocence" from *No! in Thunder* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960).

VICTOR/VICTORIA

Director: Blake Edwards. Script: Edwards, based on 1933 UFA Victor und Viktoria, conceived by Hans Hoemburg, written and directed by Rheinhold Schuenzel. Photography: Dick Bush. Music: Henry Mancini. United Artists.

Sex farces in CinemaScope expand the scope of comedy by giving characters so much more room in which to humiliate themselves. Surrounded either by the garish space of the wide screen or by the even more garish characters who populate farces, the heroes and heroines of 'Scope comedies become victims of space as well as of plot. Wherever they turn, whatever they do, the elongated frame pens them in despite the extended space of the image. In sex farces, characters perform ludicrous acts in the service of their rampant sexuality, and the wide screen serves as the final indignity to which the poor fools are subjected. It is for this reason that the comedies of Frank Tashlin and Billy Wilder so thoroughly destabilize the happy notion of sexual fulfillment: there is never enough room, never enough time, never enough satisfaction to fill the world of the wide screen.

But while Wilder and Tashlin use this farcical space in order to embarrass their characters, Blake Edwards in *Victor/Victoria* uses it to affirm their dignity even while subjecting them to low comedy. Farce for Edwards becomes the expression of his characters' sexual apotheosis, the overcoming of limitations, even something of a learning process. Beginning with the film's hero, Toddy (Robert Preston) in bed with a malevolent young man and ending with him on stage tossing a rose to his new lover, Mr. Bernstein (Alex Karras), *Victor/Victoria* is a story about the taking of power through performance; from the cramped privacy of a bedroom to a gloriously wide public stage, from drab pajamas to a glittering Spanish gown, Toddy himself turns farce into power by taking it under control, by seizing the stage and the wide screen and claiming them as his own.

In the first shot of the film, after a short pan from a window, the wide frame encloses a sleeping Toddy in a static horizontal position. Almost immediately Toddy's lover, Richard, rises spectrally from behind him in an image which efficiently and gracefully expresses three critical points. First, despite the fact that 1982 is, as everyone knows, the year in which Hollywood "handled" the gay question, this image presents two men together in bed as a shock—Toddy seems to be alone, then a man rises up beside him. Having established the surprise, however, Edwards dispenses with it in favor of the much funnier joke on which the rest of the comedy dwells, namely that of watching heterosexuals reacting to gays. In the meantime,

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this initial image also establishes two problems for the character, problems which hinge on political as well as emotional questions. Richard's departure from bed appears like a cartoon image of the nine lives of a cat, the ghosts floating upward over the prone feline; as if Richard were Toddy's own youth departing, this shot lends to Toddy an air of passivity and pathos in the face of aging. Yet Toddy's age and his lack of power become not merely the standard traits by which gay men have been represented on screen but rather elements of a representation that the character himself must overturn. Toddy begins the film in the time-honored role of the depressed homosexual —witty, charming, aging, pathetic—but in a film devoted to roles and role-playing, Edwards quickly demonstrates the necessity of taking the power of representation into one's own hands. Further, because of the framing of the shot, spatial constriction in the open context of a CinemaScope frame becomes a metaphor for social oppression. Self-assertion for Toddy will require in a sense the conquest of the image.

When Toddy first meets Victoria (Julie Andrews), he meets another victim, since Victoria has a gorgeous voice but cannot get a job because of her sweetness. Andrews's extraordinarily nimble voice rises and falls in Victoria's cheery little audition song, but the nightclub owner for whom she is auditioning tells her to "stick to Carmen" (though as Victoria points out, she is a coloratura, not a mezzo). Victoria then finds herself nimbly starving to death. She offers herself sexually to her landlord in exchange for a meatball, then aborts the deal upon discovering a cockroach in her room. When Toddy meets her again, she is busily devouring plate after plate of food, hoping ultimately to avoid paying her bill after placing, then finding, a cockroach in her salad. Recognizing in Victoria the charming spirit of a liar, Toddy befriends her, convinces her to impersonate a female impersonator, becomes her ruse of a lover, and splits her fortune. In short, Victoria's dramatic problem then becomes one of nature: she cannot help but fall in love with King Marchand (James Garner), and ultimately must choose to shed her disguise.

Victoria's initial problem, like Toddy's, stems from a failure to control her own role. Here, as in *S.O.B.*, Edwards takes a particular delight in the binds of his wife's career and

Julie Andrews: VICTOR/VICTORIA

incorporates them into the film's plot. Andrews's screen persona has moved through various phases: her winning *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music* characters rapidly made her notorious, her performance in *Torn Curtain* emphasized a certain plasticity which, however stylistically crucial for Hitchcock, only served to limit her increasingly typed persona, and by the time of the dreadful *Thoroughly Modern Millie* she had begun to take on aspects of an antique. Having lost her public, Andrews was primed for her greatest commercial disaster in Edwards's *Darling Lili,* for what Edwards failed to understand was that his rivetting fascination with his wife's talent was matched only by the public's itch to hate her. After *The Tamarind Seed,* a companion piece to *Torn Curtain* in both plot and performance style, Edwards began to perceive that Andrews had reached that peculiar level of stardom which demands self-consciousness. Andrews faced a public who found little difference between performer and performance, and she and Edwards learned to turn this apparent limitation to their advantage. Her mothering, wholesome counterpoint to Bo Derek in *10* enabled Dudley Moore's overgrown childishness to reach its apex in the final shot when he pulls Mary Poppins raunchily to the floor. In *S.O.B.*, Andrews's own on-screen purity is the source of her character's grotesque but hilarious screen image, and Edwards relentlessly strains this persona to the breaking point by making the baring of her

breasts the hype of the century. In *Victor/Victoria,* role-playing again becomes the central theme of Andrews's character, but it is a subtler, more complex construction of character within character within persona, and all in the context of a nanny out of time, forced to become a drag queen.

As the broad strokes of *S.O.B.* give way to a more lyrical treatment of the idea of roles, their malleability assumes a kind of grace, but lyricism for Edwards goes hand in hand with slapstick and low comedy. He sees in the pratfall an expression of grandeur, and the crunching of bones becomes symphonic. For Toddy and Victoria to assume the control and the power they lack as a gay man and a woman, they must engage physically, farcically, with the enemy. Victoria must deny her primness by lying, propositioning, and punching, and Toddy must ultimately hurl himself repeatedly onto the stage in order to overturn his culturally assigned role in favor of a role of his own making. In the cockroach-in-the-salad scene, the two characters' projects unite in spectacle when Edwards shoots their escape in long shot from outside the restaurant. Their tortured route as they work their way through the melee of flying tables, plates, and customers is a struggle simply to cross the image; reaching the door, they break free from the crowd and run quickly back across the empty space of the wide screen. It is this sequence which initiates their partnership, and Edwards's visual style describes not only the pleasure to be had in watching a brawl but also the necessity of commanding one's place in it.

Similarly, when Toddy's performance in the nightclub "Chez Lui" is interrupted by the boorish Richard and his pompous friends, Toddy actually introduces the ensuing fracas by announcing, "And now, ladies and gentlemen, we have a delightful surprise." This direct address from character to the film's audience signals Edwards's respect for low comedy as being more than just the love of a good laugh. For Edwards, slapstick fights are delightful: they are figures of style, and the participants are ennobled by them. Though Toddy loses his job because of it, this fight renders him heroic in the first of many actions leading to his final performance in Victoria's dress, a self-conscious celebration of role-playing and physicality.

This cluster of motifs—space and sex, farce and roles, slapstick and power—determines the film's supporting roles as well. Garner's King Marchand together with Lesley Ann Warren's Norma form the heterosexual couple which disintegrates in the face of Parisian depravity, and while Marchand ultimately commands more respect, it is Norma who grabs more attention. The comic intensity of Warren's performance, combined with the screaming vulgarity of what she is made to do—biting bonbons before replacing them in the box, dancing lewdly in front of bug-eyed men—pushes this character so far beyond the bounds of verisimilitude that she splits into a variety of aspects. As gangster's moll and dumb blonde, Norma descends from a long line of crass representation of women; as a more or less direct reference to Marilyn Monroe, this representation is qualified by a certain sexual self-awareness and the power that goes with it; as parody, Norma emerges as a constructed role which plays upon itself and, however partially, comments on its more repressive antecedents.

Marchand, in turn, serves as the heterosexual male toward whom heterosexual females gravitate. If America were as gay as the Paris of *Victor/Victoria,* Marchand might appear to be as much of a parody as Norma. Since it is not, he becomes instead an image of sexual security in a world of threats and subversion. In their own ways, both Marchand and Norma present the most disturbing images in the film —Norma as the product of a virulent history of sexual oppression, and Marchand as the reigning heterosexual male point of view. But, like Norma, Marchand is a kind of self-commentary; his name, after all, is King. Though he proves himself correct in his assumption that Victoria is really a woman, he is forced temporarily to think of himself as being attracted to another man in scenes which are among the most triumphantly comic in the film. Here, Victoria takes emotional control by virtue of her being both a woman and a gay man, and Marchand's panic becomes the object of ridicule. Similarly, when Marchand hastily leaves a gay bar out of fear and discomfort, he is drawn as if by magnetism to a bar full of working-class heterosexual men and picks a fight with them in an act of desperation. This scene, as a parody of a Western barroom brawl, makes Marchand the ridiculous end-product of the

VICTOR/VICTORIA

evolution of the heroic heterosexual, but it also offers a frustrated character a pleasurable way to release anxiety. The jumble of bodies spread out across the screen becomes in a way a metaphor for sexuality itself, not in the snickering sense of fighting as an expression of repressed homoeroticism, but as a more anarchic explosion of the myth of sexual definition and control: slapstick as an affront to the superego.

Finally, Alex Karras's affable Mr. Bernstein presents precisely that gay image which Hollywood has been chronically unable to tolerate in the past, namely one in which gayness is not a metaphor for something else, not the single most recognizable feature of a personality, and not an expression of heterosexual anxiety in the guise of a gay boogie-man. By having the character announce his gayness after riotously witnessing a primal scene starring Victor and Marchand, and by adding only one low-key fillip about being a gay football player, Edwards plays upon both psychoanalysis and social bias in the representation of a gay man who has few cinematic antecedents.

Because *Victor/Victoria* depends so drastically on the idea of representation and performance, it is the only film in this year's supposedly gay cycle to have anything at all to do with gays. This is not to say that there is any natural connection between gays and performing, but rather that the presumption governing such flimsy works as *Making Love, Personal Best,* and *Partners* is that gays may simply be represented without the slightest qualification. The ridiculously overrated *Personal Best* even goes so far as to turn lesbianism into a metaphor for a heterosexual's rites of passage; at least *Making Love* and *Partners* allow their gay characters to remain gay for the duration of the film.

With *Victor/Victoria,* however, the idea of representing gays is neither as self-congratulatory nor as perniciously naive. The film makes no attempt to gloss over the fact that its central romance occurs between heterosexuals, nor does it pretend that the stamp of heterosexual approval is suddenly worthwhile to gays. In

fact, Edwards turns that idea into an object of derision. In contrast, the shifting of emotional identification from gay to straight to gay, the disruption of heterosexual security, and the delight in gay freedom are the explicit acknowledgements of a legitimate world outside of heterosexual experience. These thematic and stylistic points are secondary, though, to Edwards's awareness that the power to characterize is, indeed, power. By emphasizing role-playing, by pushing characters to extremes, and by playing upon sexual confusion, Edwards allows for textual as well as sexual openness. That he does so in the context of farce and romance, that he opens the 'Scope frame wide enough to allow for diversity, and that his characters are penned in only by their own presumptions: these are the strategies of political art. —ED SIKOV

THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY

Calendar Productions/Handmade Films. Produced by Barry Hanson. Directed by John MacKenzie. Screenplay by Barrie Keefe. Camera by Phil Meheux. Edited by Mike Taylor. Music by Francis Monkman. Embassy Pictures.

Harold Shand (Bob Hoskins) is king of the mountain. The mob that he controls with an iron fist and calls "the Corporation," its power built up and consolidated over the bodies of a myriad of petty gangsters, rules the London rackets and underworld. Harold has ties to the Police, the government, and the London City Council. Now Harold is embarked on a dream: the construction of a 1988 London Olympic Games complex to be developed out of a huge chunk of the run-down East End harbor area. But he needs financing, and for that purpose, he has invited an American mafia kingpin (Eddie Constantine), whom he will wine and dine in style, convince of the smooth efficiency of his power, and close the deal. All it will take is a few days, a weekend.

But if Harold is sitting on top of the world, he is only in the same explosive position as Cagney in *White Heat.* Because suddenly Harold's power—the intense emotional and physical peace of such power—begins to dissolve; his empire starts to crumble. Someone begins rubbing out his lieutenants, a bomb is found in his posh Mayfair casino, another bomb explodes in his pub-restaurant just as he and the mafia people are arriving for dinner. And Harold hasn't the foggiest idea of who's responsible; he can't imagine "anyone big enough to have a go at me."

The Long Good Friday, based on a TV play by Barrie Keefe, who also wrote the screenplay (his first), is an amazingly complex, intricately plotted (and intricately told) crime tale. With its plethora of characters and occasionally impenetrable cockney accents, the film, for unalert, particularly American viewers, will be troublesome. For instance, the key to Harold's troubles occurs in the third and fourth scenes, only two of perhaps 15 fleeting scenes involving different characters, all of which occur before the initial appearance of Harold in the film. (He is thus caught in a web not directly of his own making before he is even "born" into the movie.)

The plot is far too complex for full unravelment here—which should anyway rightfully be a part of the pleasure of carefully watching the film. Let me just say that Harold's fate, to which he is entirely innocent, is due to a bit of petty pilfering by the deliverer of someone else's money (third scene) and of a completely unrelated coincidence (fourth scene) from which wrong conclusions are drawn. Who and what are coming after Harold is no less than the IRA, who do not play in Harold's game or by his rules. A character warns Harold, who learns about them only near the end of the film, "The Mick boyos don't know the rules." Another pleads with Harold, "They're political. They're not interested in money. You can't deal with them." The IRA is not treated unfairly in the film—their political motives are uncommented upon, except by Harold's incomprehension. They *are* presented as cold-blooded terrorists, out unemotionally to destroy Harold in revenge for a (mis)perceived wrong.

Lord Lew Grade, who initially funded the film, thought differently. The film has had a long history. Grade thought he was getting a low-budget TV movie—the last in a three-picture deal with producer Barry Hanson. The second was the admirable *Bloody Kids,* directed by Stephen Frears, seen here theatrically as part of the "British Film Now" adjunct to the 1980 New York Film Festival. At one point, Grade, through his funding of Black Lion Films, cut the film down for British TV, scissoring all mention of the IRA (!), trimming the violence

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and re-voicing a main character. The result, according to Hanson was "about 75 minutes of film that was literal nonsense." When Grade's own empire at ACC/ITC began crumbling (ironically mirroring Harold's downfall, without the violence), Hanson bought back the film, completed in 1979, and took it to Handmade Films for the British theatrical release.

John MacKenzie (responsible, in his only previous theatrical movie, for a marvelously mysterious bit of pre-*Omen* occult tomfoolery in 1971's *Unman, Wittering and Zigo*) has directed *Friday* in a solidly realistic style—the pacing is terse but not clipped—and scene after scene, all acted with precision, follow at tense, breakneck speed. The film was shot entirely on locations, and the resulting authenticity is wittily played off by several nearly surreal moments. The most visually audacious is one in which Harold orders his minions, in a desperate search to find out who is destroying him ("It's the work of a bloody maniac—I'll have his carcass dripping blood by midnight"), to round up all of *their* informants and cohorts, who are then strung up upside-down on meathooks and swung into a refrigerated meat packing warehouse amidst swinging sides of raw meat. MacKenzie frames the scene in two parallel lines—the upside-down hanging hoods on one side, and Harold's chiefs, all armed, on the other, between which lines Harold strides like a Roman emperor.

By its economy, visual daring, realistic settings, tough dialogue, no-nonsense characters, fast action and clean editing, *Friday* belongs to that peculiar British sub-genre of the crime film, perhaps the best of which is still *Get Carter,* but which also includes *Villain, Pulp,* and *Gumshoe,* the latter two essentially fond parodies of forties American *noir* pictures that turn into idiosyncratically serious melodramas. (They are all studies and reflections on the American model, but the British entries are all more substantial and original than the romantic/mythic French *hommages* to the same films.)

But if *Friday* were only another breathlessly paced, stylish and violent crime film, it would only be a superb piece of exploitation entertainment. What lends *Friday* its impact and importance is the fact that screenwriter Keefe, director MacKenzie, and actor Bob Hoskins (the script was re-written several times after the latter was cast) have designed the film as a character study in an almost perfect classical tragedy mold.

Helen Mirren as Victoria: THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY

Harold is surely an oddball tragic figure. But the movie metaphorically insists on this fate and structure. When Harold learns of the first two deaths of his men—the first cracks in his complacency—he breaks a glass in his hand and cuts himself. Symbolically, it is his first blooding. Near the end of the film he learns about the IRA and the activities of his youthful second-in-command Jeff (Derek Thompson) during an absence—that Jeff arranged a delivery of IRA money to Belfast, payment for a politically well-placed cohort of Harold's, for use of Irish labor in his building schemes in London; the money, sent directly to IRA coffers, helps assure there are no strikes in the London construction trades (a plot element based on fact). Still not comprehending, Harold flies into an uncontrollable rage ("Fuckin' Judas!") and kills Jeff in the film's most explicit blood-letting, a gruesome throat-cutting that covers Harold with blood. Cradling Jeff's wilting body in his arms, Harold lets out a primal scream, one that has been building throughout the film, of frustration, pain and loss (as of a son.) The next scenes intercut Harold showering the blood from his body, and his mistress Victoria (Helen Mirren) burning his bloody clothes—

ritual cleansing in two primal elements: water and fire, completing and signifying his fall.

As Harold, Bob Hoskins (seen here in the BBC TV *Pennies from Heaven, Royal Flash* and *Inserts*) creates a fascinating, indelible portrait of a man caught in existential agony, leading through a fatal flaw in his character to his undoing. Harold is a nearly perfect if perverted embodiment of the Horatio Alger myth. Born into the working class tenements, through diligence, hard work, and a calculating coldness and opportunism (and violence), he has built himself into a success, so prominent a force in the underworld that he is now almost legitimate. (The character is loosely based on the infamous Kray twin brothers, sixties London racketeers who rose to such social prominence that they were courted by the upper classes.) Harold owns a casino, plush restaurants, a long shining yacht. He wears expensive suits tailored to fit his bullet-shaped body.

But he can't forget his origins. He has no wish to join the upper classes, despite acquiring their accouterments—to them, he believes, "You are shit on their shoes." He visits his old neighborhood in Brixton at one point in the film, and returning to his parked car, he sees himself in the tough working-class kids who demand money—and get it, with a pat on the head—for having "protected" his Mercedes. He is a racist. In the same neighborhood now live West Indians and Blacks; Harold muses how "It used to be a nice street, with decent families, no scum." On his yacht, he complains about his expensive "Frog" chef, hired to oversee the lavish luncheon prepared for Constantine's arrival.

He is also sentimental. Colin (Paul Freeman), eliminated by the IRA, is an old Army buddy, with whom he grew up, who also saved his life during the war, and Harold mourns his demise. Like Cagney in *White Heat,* he reveres his mother, who is declining into a religious fanatic. (Her car and chauffeur are blown up, waiting for her to finish communion in church —the second salvo in Harold's destruction.)

Curiously, the traditional moll character Victoria (Helen Mirren) is an equivocal figure. They are the only two women of importance in the film. (A third, the widow of one of Harold's drivers who is slain in the money delivery to Belfast, also has a crucial scene.) Victoria and Harold have been living together for ten years, after the death of Harold's wife (if I correctly understood an early, quick bit of throwaway dialogue). Of all his minions, including Jeff, a young man and obvious son figure who arranges Harold's dirty work for him, Victoria does the lowest work, arranging Harold's entertainment schedule like a social secretary/hostess, but she is clearly the most important figure in his network. She is the one who finally tells Constantine about Harold's mystifying problems—she levels with him "man-to-man" while Harold stubbornly refuses to let Constantine know anything is wrong (coming up with a natural gas explosion as a futile rationalization for an obvious bombing). She thus wins Harold an extra 24 hours reprieve to clear things up. She refuses to allow Harold to "treat me like one of your thugs," and it is into her arms that he collapses when his wits and courage, after Jeff's death, finally give out. Her name alone signifies Harold's pursuit of his dream Olympic project.

Harold considers himself a businessman, now that he has brought calm to the underworld. "We've had more than ten years' peace. Everyone has his own patch. I've done everyone favors, put money in their pockets." Without yet knowing of the IRA involvement, he ironically describes his worsening situation "like fucking Belfast on a bad night." Curiously, Constantine echoes this, from his American viewpoint, in describing his stay in London "like a bad night in Vietnam."

Yet Harold is also proud, and something of a moralist as he does not deal in the London drug traffic. ("Is there no decency in this world?") And most importantly, in his whacked view of political matters, he is fiercely patriotic and becomes in essence the last spokesman for the might of the British Empire. Two key speeches reveal this. The first occurs while he is welcoming Constantine to London amid a gathering of his cronies, legitimate friends, and business associates aboard his yacht. "I'm not a politician but a businessman, but one with a sense of history. Our undertaking [the Olympic stadium] has great significance for London. We can make England into the leading European state. London can become Europe's capital. We are not out-dated—there is a future here. No other city in the world has such an opportunity for prosperity. We can

mastermind the New London. We have the knowledge and expertise to do it." He then offers a toast: "Hands across the Ocean." Later, after his assassination of some IRA figures and one of his conniving underlings, which Harold believes will teach the IRA not to fool with him any more, he visits Constantine in his hotel room.

Constantine has had enough—he is packing to leave, and Harold, his dream ruined, gets angry. His eyes narrow to slits, and his voice becomes a growl. He tells Constantine off as if he were still a colonial insignificant, berating him for his failing under crisis. "The British are used to action. The days when you Yanks can come over here to save us are over. You don't have to contribute to what England will give the world. We're sophisticated—we're in the Common Market now. And when things get tough here, we don't lose our balls."

Harold leaves in a huff. But he *has* lost, he just doesn't know it yet. He hops into what he takes to be his Mercedes. He looks up startled to see Victoria, who was waiting for him, being spirited away in another car. (Importantly, she is the last figure to be taken away from him—the entire film represents Harold's increasing isolation.) Finally he is alone; in the front seat are the two IRA killers we recognize as Colin's murderers. As happens to many British statesmen, even one so oddly misfit if sincere as Harold, the world has passed him by. The camera lingers on his face for a long while. His fate sinks in. He's played the game by the only set of rules he knows, never realizing for a second that his rules are archaic, that his game is a useless conception of the past. Stuck on Good Friday, neither Harold (one of the British cinema's most complex and vibrant characters) nor the film ever reach the promised resurrection of Easter Sunday.

—DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

THREE BROTHERS

Director: Francesco Rosi. Photography: Pasquale de Santis. Screenplay: Rosi. Music: Piero Piccioni. New World Pictures.

Francesco Rosi is a politically committed director whose inventive and powerful earlier films —*Salvatore Giuliano, Hands Over the City, The Mattei Affair*—were complex, austere and impersonal examinations of political and social issues. Rosi is clearly a man of the left, and in these intricately narrated, semi-documentary works he eschewed radical political rhetoric and melodramatic violence for open-ended interrogations into the nature of political and economic power. In his most recent films (e.g., *Christ Stopped at Eboli*) Rosi has moved away from his neo-documentary style to a more personal, meditative and lyrical form of film-making. *Christ Stopped at Eboli* was still deeply entwined with the political and social world, the rural ethos of southern Italy under Fascism —but one could sense aspects of Rosi's sensibility, his reflections about his place in the world, within the consciousness of the film's protagonist, Carlo Levi.

In his latest film, *Three Brothers,* Rosi has become even more directly personal. The film is a richly textured and radiant work, touched with bits of personal memory and quiet wisdom, and at the same time it views with a keen dry eye the full desperation of the contemporary social and political situation in Italy, in some ways analogous to our world as well. It is central to *Three Brothers* that the film opens with a nightmare of a garbage-strewn landscape overrun with scavenger rats, predators among the ruins.

The film takes off from this image by bringing together three brothers, now living in three different cities (Rome, Turin and Naples), in disparate occupations and holding very different values. Brought back by the death of their mother to the country village they grew up in, they try to comfort their old father, discuss their lives, and reveal themselves to be intellectually and politically in opposition to each other. This is especially true of Raffaele (played with quiet dignity by Philippe Noiret), the magistrate from Rome, and Nicola (Michele Placido), the Turin factory worker—both of whose political positions are treated by Rosi as equally valid and persuasive.

Raffaele's work as a judge, especially in a new position offered him, involves the daily risk of being killed by terrorists whose massacres of witnesses, judges, and policemen not only appear on television, but have begun to dominate Raffaele's nightmares. No scorned "Establishment" figure, Raffaele is a reasonable, thoughtful man, whose concerns are

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gravely moral and whose house is plain and devoid of luxury. We believe him when he says that he struggles to maintain some social order in the face of those who want to change everything at once or smash it all, who would replace persuasion by fear.

But the other brothers too are trying in their own ways to sustain what is human. Nicola, as hot and volatile as Raffaele is quietly reflective, argues with the anger of a displaced and exploited Southerner struggling for equitable and decent conditions in his Turin auto factory, not condoning terrorism, but full of a sense of his rights violated and finally accepting forms of violence as the only means available to correct those abuses.

Because Nicola is twenty years younger than the judge brother, the conflict between the two is partly generational. So while Raffaele's long-term traditional marriage is still intact, Nicola's has split, he and his wife full of hostility toward one another, the younger woman an independent Northerner of a wholly different world from either the brothers' mother or the judge's wife. Nicola, who is identified with the left, maintains a traditional moral and sexual code, sexually freewheeling himself but deeply disturbed by his wife's brief infidelity. These confusions and contradictions make Nicola a more nuanced character.

The third brother, the gentle withdrawn Rocco, the least developed and well realized character, works with delinquent boys, whom he protects from the police but doesn't romanticize. He envisions a world that will be overrun by barbarians unless there is some change of heart; religious, he not only dreams of a world devoured by scavenging hungry African children, by southern Italian boy thieves and murderers, but he also consoles himself with utopian fantasies of a new world swept clean of drugs, money and destruction. For Rosi, all three brothers represent different aspects of his consciousness—all of them, despite their differences, committed to a politics and a society based on humanistic values.

Even in his extensive and skillful use of dreams, fantasies, and nightmares that his characters experience, Rosi remains rooted in the real. The brothers' ancient father Donato (played with almost mute eloquence by the 89-year-old Charles Vanel) has a vision of his wife, their two breathtakingly beautiful old faces luminously shining at one another as they try to catch a hare. The wife's vanishing and reappearing and waving goodbye tells us in the most delicate way that she is a kind of apparition. Rosi can do that without strain, without the baroque magic of Fellini, but with a quiet concrete beauty all his own, entwined simultaneously in the daily and the sublime, as the camera continues to focus on the old man's infinitely lined face and his dark, bent back, his formally garbed decency. There are equally memorable moments of more eerie fantasy—a little girl skating through the empty passages of a sterile modern apartment tower. Even real moments of a child's lyrical delight can shade into dream, as when Marta joyfully whirls in a hay-strewn shed.

But the film always has the firmest grasp on the texture of the real world. Rosi constantly frames people with images of ancient buildings and with wide-angle shots of the town square and cobblestoned streets. He also honors the past by lovingly panning around the farm's storage shed, with its old wagon and nets, buckets, shovels, old boots, without being quaint or indulging in saccharine nostalgia. The father's handsome white-washed farmhouse is at the film's center and as important as any character. Set high up on a hill, with its bricky textures, slightly irregular windows and doors, wrought iron gate, its courtyard filled with the play of light and shadow, it continually frames the old man and dog just as one feels it has framed his life.

The house is walking distance from the village center, and there is one image—a beautiful long shot from the farm of the vertically built village, which evokes the organic unity of that world. Rosi's eloquent slow panning and tracking camera, fixing on the simple beauties of time and place, reinforces that sense of harmony and coherence. Not all the architectural details are so saturated with a sense of connectedness. The image with which the film opens, to the accompaniment of a heartbeat and forbidding music, is a blank modern structure, blind, severe, black squares for windows, full of foreboding. Not unrelatedly, the modern flat Nicola returns to when he daydreams about reuniting with his wife, looks directly out at the wall of another sterile tower block, flat upon flat, like an ant hill. It is certainly tempting to see this film as a paean to a

lost past, and to see all beauty and love invested by Rosi in that simpler time, with the present as the locus of only despair and violence.

The loving way the camera focuses on the silent, weatherworn dignity of the old man and the golden glow of his bedroom as he tenderly, with few words, tells his granddaughter about the Big Dipper, contrasts painfully with the bare ugly space in the bedroom where the three brothers lie dreaming disturbing dreams and engaging in political arguments. The old man is productive, calm and rooted, a man who at the film's conclusion can place his dead wife's gold ring on the same finger where his own marriage ring lies—a union of love and fidelity unto death, while the sons who lead less patterned and predictable, and more expansive lives, struggle and feel despair.

However, Rosi doesn't quite sentimentalize the rural past; he knows it is fast disappearing, that the most energetic and ambitious (and even those without energy) must leave for the cities, the North, or for other countries, to build careers or simply get work. And the three brothers themselves cannot go home again—they are strangers to the rhythms of village life. The village itself is invaded by television reports of crime in Rome, and images of terrorist killers so arrogant they don't even bother to wear masks. The villagers debate the matter among themselves and the judge's old childhood friend extends the sense that this remote simple life is no sanctuary, by arguing that Italy has through its history been bloody and violent, and unable to come together in a unity of governing and governed.

Though Rosi never shows how harsh and narrow peasant life can be, he does intimate how patriarchal it was and is. There are images of old Father Donato speaking to his wife as if to a child, and the card game in the village is a male preserve—the women off at home, at their traditional domestic pursuits. Even so, the beautiful dream image of Donato's wedding interrupted by a shower and followed by a drive to a white-sanded beach in a cabriolet invokes a simple world of harmony and love. But the sons, though bound by their individual pain (a dazzling deep focus shot captures all three separated physically from each other, their faces filled with anguish, contemplating their respective lives) are also decent people who have not yet been defeated—valiantly continuing to grope, against steep odds, to define some sense of human good larger than themselves.

What is defeated is—at least within the frame of the film—the chance for a genuine reconciliation, a coming to terms with each other. If the family is Italy itself, it is a sobering fact that the three brothers cannot really talk (despite mutual affection) but only argue; and that the magistrate, the rational man, can only envisage mad destruction at the hands of terrorists in his dreams. The film eschews any ultimate consolation, except Rocco's pop style dream of miraculous reconstruction, a facile and incongruous image, built on nothing we can see—except the faith that Raffaele too says we must have lest we be entirely lost.

For this reason *Three Brothers* is a film touched with a profound sense of pain and melancholy. However, Rosi is not deceiving himself when he continually insists in interviews that he has created a work of hope, not

despair. *Three Brothers* argues for a humanistic commitment—a transformation through love and social concern—against those in Italy who through terror, violence and chaos would undermine human values. Rosi's socialism clearly wears a human face. One of the most significant sequences in the film occurs as Raffaele studies photographs of a judge's murder—the camera scanning the faces of a dead young terrorist and policeman, both radiating youth and beauty. Raffaele's dry manner while thoughtfully scrutinizing the photos is typical of Rosi's capacity to elicit in a uniquely quiet way a cry against the destruction of precious life and a muted call to redeem ourselves.

It is Rosi's restraint which is the source of both his artistic strength and his few limitations. For Rosi as always does not create full psychological portraits. His characters are more than mere social symbols, but there are moments when they seem thin and schematic—becoming mouthpieces for ideas or representations for current Italian socio-political problems (e.g., Rocco—the problem of the disaffected young). We also need only conjure up our own family memories—our parents' and grandparents' marriages—to perceive how much more complicated they were and are than Rosi's idyllic imagery of Donato and his wife.

But to conscientiously try to do the critics' job of defining the film's flaws is in this case to carp and quibble, because Rosi has succeeded in making a film which combines formal beauty, sensuous detail, and a profound and complex sense of human continuity and dignity. *Three Brothers* offers no sentimental bromides or pat political solutions to the turmoil that envelopes Italian life. The film does affirm human possibility—the link between past and future, grandfather and granddaughter—but those images resonate more on an emotional than intellectual or political level. Marta's discovery of an egg, her offering of new births, at the end of the film is too frail a vision from which to wrest a more caring future out of Italy's fragmentation. But that the links do exist, and that the three brothers continue to struggle, refusing to succumb to nihilism or despair, holds out some hope that something better can be created.

Francesco Rosi is a large-spirited, subtle director who has made a deeply moving film.

—BARBARA AND LEONARD QUART

Books

LINDSAY ANDERSON

By Allison Graham. Boston; Twayne, 1981. $15.95.

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The careers of John Schlesinger, Lindsay Anderson, and Sydney Pollack reflect a range of political concern and aesthetic commitment thoroughly treated in these three volumes of the Twayne series. Editor Warren French has, presumably, exacted a rewrite from the doctoral dissertation writers in order to make these studies accessible to the average cineaste. Since these three men are still valiantly at the front of film-making, it is difficult to draw hard and fast conclusions about such varied careers. Nor does any author try.

Anderson and Schlesinger both rose out of the documentary tradition that foreshadowed Britain's Free Cinema, a term coined by Anderson himself, so that "the journalists would have an *idea* to write about and not just a cinema programme. Without that declamatory title, I honestly believe the Press would have paid us no attention at all . . . it was a successful piece of cultural packaging." Allison Graham has culled the appropriate information about Anderson for her formalist study of his work. The fact that his cinematic *oeuvre* really consists of only three feature films, masterpieces though they may be, leads to some rather belabored analyses of every shade of meaning of every symbol of every turn of events and transformation. Suffice it to say she is thorough, if not efficient.

The first chapter on Anderson's work as a critic and then as a documentary maker is full of politics and polemics, and Graham gives us a good portrait of the man as maker of his own image. His skepticism about any kind of movement is clear: "I think that socialist society is as liable to victimize the artist as any other." Graham shows the internal contradictions which make Anderson's films so human, despite their alienating affectations and psycho-

despair. *Three Brothers* argues for a humanistic commitment—a transformation through love and social concern—against those in Italy who through terror, violence and chaos would undermine human values. Rosi's socialism clearly wears a human face. One of the most significant sequences in the film occurs as Raffaele studies photographs of a judge's murder—the camera scanning the faces of a dead young terrorist and policeman, both radiating youth and beauty. Raffaele's dry manner while thoughtfully scrutinizing the photos is typical of Rosi's capacity to elicit in a uniquely quiet way a cry against the destruction of precious life and a muted call to redeem ourselves.

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logically charged subjectivity. She accepts this unquestioningly and finds the truth of the human condition in *This Sporting Life*'s (mal) treatment of upward mobility or within the confines of the social system it serves, as reflected in *If.* . . . Anderson's search for individual freedom as a result of self-discovery has its apotheosis in *O Lucky Man!* If all this sounds sociopsychologically complex, it is, and it must be said that Anderson's films have always attracted such analysis, even if he himself claims, "We were not making a film about a 'worker,' . . . we were not, in a word, making sociology."

What Graham fails to crystallize is that Anderson's concern with realism, like Brecht's, excluded the aesthetic of socialist realism, the development of which only radicalized his own claims on realism. She quotes him quoting Brecht to the effect that realism is not a matter of showing real things, but of showing how things really are, which of course requires the appropriate exaggeration and emphasis. In vain, one expects "surrealism" to be applied to Anderson's work, especially in the detailed chapter on *O Lucky Man!*

Anderson's regular theatrical work has surely influenced his film-making, and that aspect remains untreated. But it is the theatrical Lindsay Anderson, who refuses to reflect any values in films other than those he can personally defend, who can challenge other liberals with his acerbic wit: "Revolution is the Opium of the Intellectuals." It is the devotion of the English to their theatrical and eccentric intellectuals that keeps Anderson working and in a position to size up his countrymen as "believing the sun would never be so impolite as to set on the Empire." But every manger must have its dog, and this study respects such watchdogs.

A perfectly bankable director should be someone like Sydney Pollack, and yet, according to William R. Taylor's book, like Anderson's, his critical acclaim is out of proportion to his box office, except abroad. Taylor does a straightforward, relaxed evaluation of Pollack's conventional films with unconventional content. His book is a cause-and-effect, nuts-and-bolts study that shows how much Pollack has developed out of his television origins, and why he can afford to experiment as much as he does.

Apparently, Pollack is a likeable and respected cog in the dream machinery, who manages to gain people's confidence in his ability and ideas. And although his career has had a few low points such as *Bobby Deerfield,* he has continued to work out of sheer determination and what Pollack calls "career muscle." A reputation gained from successful films gives a director the muscle he needs to establish control over his films, and the only way to have successful films is to increase the odds—make lots.

Taylor points out that because Pollack was both director and producer of his flops (*The Yakuza* and *Bobby Deerfield*), "the assumption is that the visual image is exactly as he wished it." Taylor then illustrates how these works fit in and reflect a consistency of vision in Pollack's work. His criticism runs the standard Twayne gamut—form, narrative, metaphoric elements, political perspectives and a heavy emphasis on character. The character analysis is certainly justified by the diametric opposition between the males and the females of Pollack's films. Taylor addresses this in two chapters: "From Aggressive to Passive: the Nature of Men" and "The Inner Strength of Women" which conclude "While Pollack's men destroy in their roles as the preservers of life, Pollack's women create for exactly the same reason." *Absence of Malice* had not yet been made.

One of the propositions of Taylor's book is that Pollack's films all have a circular structure: the end reflects the beginning and "our perceptions about the main character do provide the circularity, for the characters remain fundamentally the same." Taylor's graceful prose style makes this seem more obvious than it is, for a case can be made that what is interesting about Pollack's characters is the way they begin by having gone far astray from their "real" selves and our satisfaction lies in seeing them grow into the people we wanted them to be. Taylor stays away from intellectual jargon and avoids striving for the abstract, however, when the concrete is omnipresent, making his book a pleasurable read when dealing with moral concern, visual development and value systems.

What we miss is an account of Pollack's method with actors—how he creates those characters. He's worked with the best, and they are all alive and talking. The prestige of the Twayne series will, I hope, enable its authors

to get interviews with some of the key figures in the careers of living directors. Sydney Pollack without Robert Redford's commentary is a sting without a wasp.

Nevertheless, Taylor has shown us the way Pollack's films depend on genre to make us feel comfortable, and then how the characters' isolation and alienation speak to the more serious issues of American social discourse. Their challenge to the system is what creates the "serious" feel of the movie and what makes Pollack a front-runner in Hollywood. Although his films have incorporated innovations from the avant-garde cinema, he claims, "I'm not an innovator, and never have been. I got into film eventually because I loved film as a kid, and what I loved was bullshit movies."

John Schlesinger provides a case study of an Anderson-type who might have been a Pollack-type. He made his compromises with Hollywood, and Gene D. Phillips's book illustrates how he did it without compromising himself. He knows Schlesinger personally and therefore has access to information about the productions' hurdles. Staunch defender of Schlesinger's war and peace films, Phillips stance is best revealed in a passage about the much maligned *Yanks:* "For me *Yanks* is Schlesinger's supreme work of social realism, since it does not look and feel like a movie about WWII that was produced at the end of the 1970's, but like an authentic documentary shot during that critical period and only recently brought to light." Better friend hath no man!

Extending credit is a strong point of this book and Phillips gives room for Schlesinger to thank, for example, Jim Clark, his editor since *Darling.* Phillips goes the entire distance in showing his "auteur" to be part of a process, who retains his creativity in the art of learning to accept other people's contributions. Phillips has a certain *noblesse oblige* in the way he acquits himself and his director of these debts.

That rare bird, a creative producer, got Schlesinger started. Italian-born Joseph Janni is given full credit for his role in recognizing the potential of someone who could capture the temperament of a barnstorming Italian opera company in a brief documentary. Television and the Free Cinema had paved the way for the kind of subjects Janni wanted Schlesinger to direct, although the director had never been a part of that vague movement.

A Kind of Loving establishes the principal theme of Schlesinger's work: "My films are about the problem that people have in finding security and happiness in life, and the need for accepting what is second best when that is all that one can realistically hope for." In Penelope Gilliatt he found a soul-mate and the perfect expression for his cinema of compromise. *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* treats the confusion of sex, media, moral values and "kinds of loving" in the paralysis that precedes liberation. Phillips corrects the record on Peter Finch's final speech in that film, which has been assumed to have been improvised. It was precisely that scene that caught Schlesinger, with his conviction that we inevitably fall short of our expectations. Likewise, box office often falls short of critical recognition, and that masterwork was badly marketed, he claims. He is probably right about pre-*Cage aux folles* America accepting men kissing.

His biggest success, *Marathon Man,* incorporates the British and American resources such a director can tap—eminent actors from both sides of the pond, the high production values of Hollywood, the conscience of British productions, rooted as it is in television (British TV being significantly better than its American cousin). Schlesinger manages to work in England often by maintaining his ties to the theater, where he has more opportunity to develop ways of working with actors than the cinema allows. Although it might seem that Schlesinger would be stranded mid-Atlantic, he claims, "one also realizes that films must be international." Some critics claim that is what homogenizes his films.

He is often offered prepackaged films, but prefers to work only on those he has initiated, although that entails backing from studios whose mercurial "flavor-of-the-month club mentality" he must cater to. "History proves that it's the risky projects that stand the greatest chance of making a breakthrough," he points out, remembering *Midnight Cowboy,* and justifying *Honky Tonk Freeway,* which he made because he likes to laugh and because "it is also a deeply felt piece about survival."

Phillips's book makes us realize how many risks Schlesinger has taken and how he calculated them, to wit, "even though people go to the movies mostly for entertainment, it is still possible to give them motion pictures that will

also stir the imagination and disturb the mind." —KAREN JAEHNE

IDEOLOGY AND THE IMAGE

Social Representation in the Cinema and other Media

By Bill Nichols. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981. $9.95.

A question which tends to guide a reading of *Ideology and the Image* is one of audience: one wonders if this book is intended for the undergraduate film student, the film scholar, scholars in related fields, or simply the general public. It is this basic question which guides the elaboration of the points in this review.

No one will deny, at this point, the need for a well-informed and accurate account of the workings of ideology within systems of representations (film, television, photography, etc.). Such work in literature has a long tradition which film followed first with the theories elaborated by Eisenstein and other Soviet filmmakers. A renaissance of this issue in terms of film theory and criticism can be attributed to, among others, the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics of the late sixties. Their own turbulent historical conjuncture led them to a closer analysis of how Marxist concepts might illuminate cinematic praxis (which includes theory, criticism, and history).

Ideology and the Image is generally well thought-out and follows a strategic path in its formal organization. From a discussion of the perceptual process which owes much to Gestalt and Freudian theories, Nichols moves to an assessment of representational images and finally to film. These first three chapters might be pegged as the theoretical base from which the author launches his attack upon certain texts (to follow his exploratory metaphor with a military one). Minor questions arise in this first third of the volume, such as the correspondence made between narrative-exposition-poetics and fiction-documentary-experimental cinemas. Also in question is a concept of closure in the classic film, which is relegated to an apparently inherent desire for closure in the subject. The discussion is generally well-founded, however, in relation to the work of narrative theoreticians such as Roland Barthes and A. J. Greimas.

The second section of the book is devoted to analyses of two classical Hollywood films, *Blonde Venus* and *The Birds*. It is here that a number of the contradictions present throughout the book become evident. Indeed, much is made in the volume of the historical perspective and distance needed by a subject in order to evaluate the ideological underpinnings of cinema in general and of film texts in particular. When the discussion turns to ethnographic films, science becomes an issue and Nichols makes appropriate criticisms of disciplines which see themselves as free of ideology. However, this critical distance does not seem to be incorporated as it relates to *Ideology and the Image* itself, a meta-critical level to which Nichols gives some importance, but fails to explore satisfactorily.

The *Birds* chapter (the *Blonde Venus* chapter to a lesser extent) is an example of this process. The often quoted analysis of *Young Mr. Lincoln* by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* editors emphasized a theoretical principle left unmentioned in *Ideology and the Image,* that of structured absences. Simply put, a text may signify as well by its omissions, structured by and through ideology, as by its inclusions. The structured absence from the *Birds* chapter and from the entire text of *Ideology and the Image* is the figure of film theoretician Raymond Bellour. One still wonders as to the tactical reasons for this absence, that of the name of a researcher whose work in film theory has been considerable and important, but more strikingly, of someone who was/is responsible for one of the first examples of rigorous textual analysis, in 1969. Even more striking is the subject of this thirteen-year-old analysis, Hitchcock's *The Birds.*

The stills at the head of the chapter appeared in the original Bellour article in *Cahiers du Cinéma,* an analysis of the Bodega Bay crossing sequence, which marked the appearance of the concepts of displacement and condensation in film theory. Borrowed from Freud and Lacan, both terms have now become common currency and are used by Nichols himself in *Ideology and the Image.* Furthermore, the last segment of the *Birds* analysis, enigmatically entitled "Psychoanalysis Aside," alludes di-

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rectly to a "blockage set up between the imaginary and symbolic," a concept not only developed by Bellour in 1975, but one which is the very title of his landmark analysis of *North by Northwest,* "Le Blocage Symbolique" (*Communications* #23).

In a book devoted to an analysis of ideology, specifically mentioning how history must be an active part of this consciousness raising process, it seems apparent that the historical evolution of the ideas which led to *Ideology and the Image* is sadly lacking. The choice of the two film texts (*The Birds, Blonde Venus*) seems arbitrary; they are simply said to be representative of classical Hollywood Cinema. This stands out as too casual an explanation of the choice of subjects of analysis. The practice of textual analysis itself is seen without an historical context. Metz never ventured into textual analysis itself, but left the task to other writers close to him, namely Bellour and Thierry Kuntzel. Why then are both names omitted from Nichols's book? Must one invoke the metaphor of an Oedipal struggle between son and father?

The question which began this review then returns, who is this book for? If it is destined for a public basically unfamiliar with theoretical writings in film, must this historical perspective be eradicated from the books? If it is destined for film scholars, is this then a veiled strategic move? One might also mention that English-language translations of Bellour's work were discussed as early as 1979 by the editors of *Camera Obscura,* two years before publication of *Ideology and the Image.* As editor of the widely read *Movies and Methods,* Nichols cannot claim innocence in these matters.

The last three chapters of the book discuss various aspects of documentary cinema including principles of exposition, the work of Frederick Wiseman, and the ethnographic cinema. These are less problematic. Nichols analyses the methods through which authority is validated in the CBS Evening News (while unfortunately leaving aside the specificity of the television viewing experience as opposed to film) and the rhetorical strategies of John Huston's *The Battle of San Pietro.* Both seem valid discussions. The analysis of Wiseman's work is, along with the appendix on flicker and motion in film, one of the most useful sections of the book and finally gives us a much needed critical appraisal of these films. Nichols rejects former praise and criticism of Wiseman and opts for an evaluation of the films which points to their limitations without neglecting their potential impact for social change.

The final chapter on ethnographic films also devotes time to a filmic practice which has gone largely unevaluated. However, an element lacking from the discussion is that of the question of audience: where are these films seen, who benefits from them (although this is answered to some degree), what site of production is responsible for them? One might ask, for example, how Wiseman's own films might be consumed as ethnographic films by other cultures. Finally, the distinction between narrative and non-narrative film seems inappropriate if only because the very existence of a non-narrative film is to be questioned. One might, instead, speak of a gradation of texts from classical to modernist narrative.

Ideology and the Image has defects, but it cannot be considered unscholarly or obscurantist. There is great value in many of Nichols's arguments and they are presented in often humorous and highly imaginative language. Yet there are problems here which must not be overlooked by whoever reads or uses the book (e.g., in a classroom). It is difficult to know, for example, if the square-format frame enlargements of *Blonde Venus* are to be blamed on Nichols or on Indiana University Press. The call is then for a careful reading, but for a reading nonetheless.

—FABRICE ZIOLKOWSKI

HISTORY OF BOURGEOIS PERCEPTION

By Donald M. Lowe. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Professor Lowe's formidable, highly interesting effort combines aspects of Phenomenology, Marxism, Foucault and communication theory toward the end of chronicling an ambitious history of perception itself. Its major emphasis rests on bourgeois sensibility between the last third of the eighteenth and the earliest decade of the twentieth century.

Lowe defines bourgeois as Western European society, particularly France and Britain, more narrowly, the fortunate side of capitalism,

rectly to a "blockage set up between the imaginary and symbolic," a concept not only developed by Bellour in 1975, but one which is the very title of his landmark analysis of *North by Northwest,* "Le Blocage Symbolique" (*Communications* #23).

In a book devoted to an analysis of ideology, specifically mentioning how history must be an active part of this consciousness raising process, it seems apparent that the historical evolution of the ideas which led to *Ideology and the Image* is sadly lacking. The choice of the two film texts (*The Birds, Blonde Venus*) seems arbitrary; they are simply said to be representative of classical Hollywood Cinema. This stands out as too casual an explanation of the choice of subjects of analysis. The practice of textual analysis itself is seen without an historical context. Metz never ventured into textual analysis itself, but left the task to other writers close to him, namely Bellour and Thierry Kuntzel. Why then are both names omitted from Nichols's book? Must one invoke the metaphor of an Oedipal struggle between son and father?

The question which began this review then returns, who is this book for? If it is destined for a public basically unfamiliar with theoretical writings in film, must this historical perspective be eradicated from the books? If it is destined for film scholars, is this then a veiled strategic move? One might also mention that English-language translations of Bellour's work were discussed as early as 1979 by the editors of *Camera Obscura,* two years before publication of *Ideology and the Image.* As editor of the widely read *Movies and Methods,* Nichols cannot claim innocence in these matters.

The last three chapters of the book discuss various aspects of documentary cinema including principles of exposition, the work of Frederick Wiseman, and the ethnographic cinema. These are less problematic. Nichols analyses the methods through which authority is validated in the CBS Evening News (while unfortunately leaving aside the specificity of the television viewing experience as opposed to film) and the rhetorical strategies of John Huston's *The Battle of San Pietro.* Both seem valid discussions. The analysis of Wiseman's work is, along with the appendix on flicker and motion in film, one of the most useful sections of the book and finally gives us a much needed critical appraisal of these films. Nichols rejects former praise and criticism of Wiseman and opts for an evaluation of the films which points to their limitations without neglecting their potential impact for social change.

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Lowe defines bourgeois as Western European society, particularly France and Britain, more narrowly, the fortunate side of capitalism,

". . . oligarchic and corporative, prone to imitate aristocratic forms and manners. Not only was the bourgeois confined to the formalized hierarchy . . . , but its outlook was restrained within that field of perception." (27)

Marxism defines the other consequences of capitalism, conditions of alienation/estrangement and a dominant bourgeois ideology touting objective reason in support of its own stability. Yet where Marx posits a social structure of many levels, Phenomenology looks out horizontally, defining its perceptual field in terms of historically-bound conventions respecting space and time.

How may such implicit conventions be rendered visible? Lowe turns to Foucault, whose work underlines the assumptive bases supporting human discourse in any historical period, the unspoken agreements that screen our understandings. They shift, period-to-period, as cultural values mutate.

One product of industrial capitalism was the wide dissemination of popular forms, drawing on the printed word in particular, to mediate bourgeois perception. Here Lowe enlists a communication theory: Walter Ong's *The Presence of the Word.* Ong argues that eras are distinctively supported by particular media that both document and sustain different hierarchal orders among our five senses; at various times, sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell will assume alternate orders of importance. Oral, chirographic, typographic and electronic media: each has inflected the perceptions of a given epoch. In its emphasis on the media as perceptual extensions, the proposition is McLuhanesque, but Ong doesn't go so far as to forsake message for medium. Both cause and consequence, media bear more implicated relationships to their times.

How then does film fit into this involved, multifaceted theoretical construct? Lowe brings his various forces to bear on a broad definition of bourgeois society, a time

> . . . constituted by a typographic culture which was supplemented by the photographic revolution, and thus by an extended visuality, as well as by the epistemic order of development-in-time. No longer a spatial extension, the field of perception opened forth by the dynamics of bourgeois society had new depths which temporality alone could connect. Hence the taxonomic knowledge of the previous period was replaced by a different knowledge of dynamic process. "Development" was a new word, indicating a new consciousness of time as process. For example, Foucault showed that the new "Philology, biology, and political economy were established, not in the places formerly occupied by general grammar, natural history, and the analysis of wealth, but in an area where these forms of knowledge did not exist." And within this dynamic field, the subject began to realize new depth, new reflexivity. "Personality" by the beginning of this period acquired its modern meaning, i.e., an individual person. And by the end of this period, Freud proposed the subconscious as the causality for this new personality. (14)

Film, then, "arrives" at the tail-end of a cultural time when popular entertainments, fiction especially, have been characterized by positivist faith in visible, comprehensible, tangible "reality," fascinated with time and change, and by developing awareness that its own world nurtures new attitudes toward individual consciousness, toward some dimensions of the "person" which *escape* consciousness.

Today we have a variety of studies describing film's genesis; more are forthcoming. Some works, like Frank McConnell, *The Spoken Seen;* Bruce Kawin, *Telling it Again and Again;* Keith Cohen, *Film and Fiction;* Alan Spiegel, *Fiction and the Camera Eye;* and my own *Film and the Narrative Tradition,* although rarely in agreement, consider movie and fictional "likenesses." Such arguments may be more or less cast in a chronological design, more or less suggesting some perceptual evolution. In a piece called "Cinema and the Romantic Tradition," (*Millenium Film Journal,* V. 1 No. 1, 1978), John Hagan argues that early films appeared in a moment of heightened visual consciousness that developed in the nineteenth century among Romantic, Symbolist, and Aesthetic writers, themselves impressed by optical phenomena such as the diorama. Etc.

To the extent that a history of nineteenth-century consciousness can be trusted, it may sometime be possible to situate customary recountings of media events, artistic or otherwise, upon a broad-based foundation that effectively grounds popular culture in contemporary social/political/perceptual/communication theory.

Such an undertaking would hardly be as simple as dumping earlier books atop a new one. For one thing, some authors, McConnell and Kawin among them, often appear to be

so fully committed to ahistorical (e.g., myth) and/or to formalist inquiries that materialist bases for their propositions could well be viewed as either inimical or irrelevant. For another, Lowe's own film discussion (124–133) sometimes rests slimly on minimal, outdated references.

Lowe locates early film within a transitional phase he describes as From Linearity to Multi-Perspectivity, distinguishing, in the case of fictional film, plot (stemming from the pre-1905 bourgeois novel) from techniques of narrative (shots, editing patterns), both elements marking the ascendency of the image over earlier typographic culture.

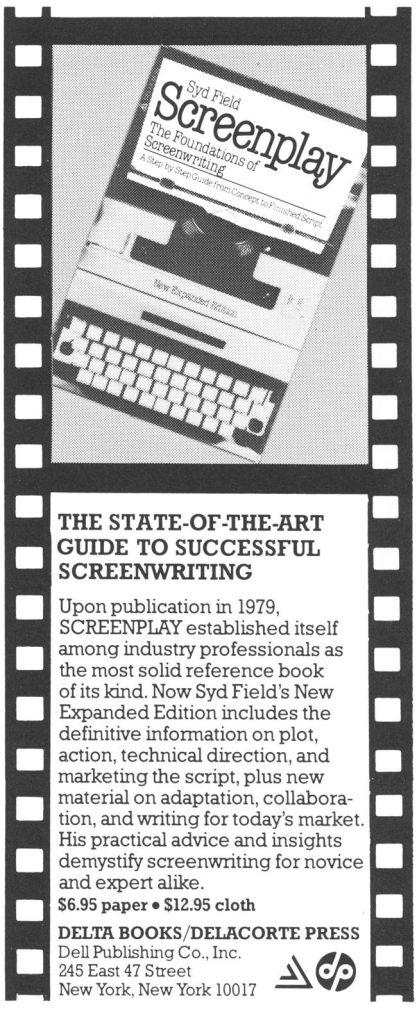
Such argument, I would suggest, ignores the submersion of what is clearly movie-like narrative design deep in nineteenth-century literature, of its imagery in such ephemera as pre-1905 stereograph cards and magazine illustration, of its *visual* continuity in earlier popular graphics like the comic strip.

Some qualifications might be accommodated just by adjusting dates (1905 handily lets Lowe commence his exposition with Edmund Husserl's lectures on the phenomenology of internal time-consciousness). I suspect, however, that the historical problems are much more deeply situated. Some form of multi-perspectived visual consciousness runs back disturbingly far. Frank McConnell makes apt references to Wordworth's *The Prelude* and Byron's *The Bride of Abydos.*

On the other hand, there is recent research that might be marshalled in support of Lowe's multi-perspective time/space reconstitutions in his 1905–15 period. To cite a single instance, André Gaudreault, "Temporalité et narrativité: le cinéma des premiers temps (1895–1908)," (*Études Litteraires* April 1980) worries out alternate early approaches to motion picture time-space continuities and ellipses. He traces forms of overlap which contradict any simple notions that film followed an uncomplicated, coherent evolution in expository method. In Gaudreault's view, space and time wage a running skirmish in which relative emphasis on either has its separate effects on camera placement, editing patterns, and viewer empathy. What the contemporary eye may view as narrative mismatches were, in fact, alternative ways to think about storytelling. [By this measure, in Ong's terms, is *How They Do Things on the Bowery* (Edison 1902) "typographic," "electronic" or transitional?]

However exasperating the thought, Lowe may be only a harbinger of yet-more-complicated visions spanning yet more centuries. What if the matter of sense primacies remains still only dimly understood? What if we are hearing only the uppermost voice of a fugue-like complex of sense relationships running back past the English Romantics to other cultural traditions, some folk traditions, that defy easy correlation with ideas like Dominant Ideology?

In the long run, Lowe's arguments may best be viewed not as solutions, but as promising starts. His great contribution is to propose a design whose precepts draw from political materialism, Phenomenology, esthetics, semiology and communication theory, harnessed to operate side-by-side, each supplementing, not



undercutting the others, all pointed to common purpose. Such felicitous teamwork (in truth not always effected in Lowe's study) sounds utopian: Theoretical models working together within confines of a common hard or soft cover, rather than spatting condescension and retaliation from the bulwarks of their separate bindings. —JOHN FELL

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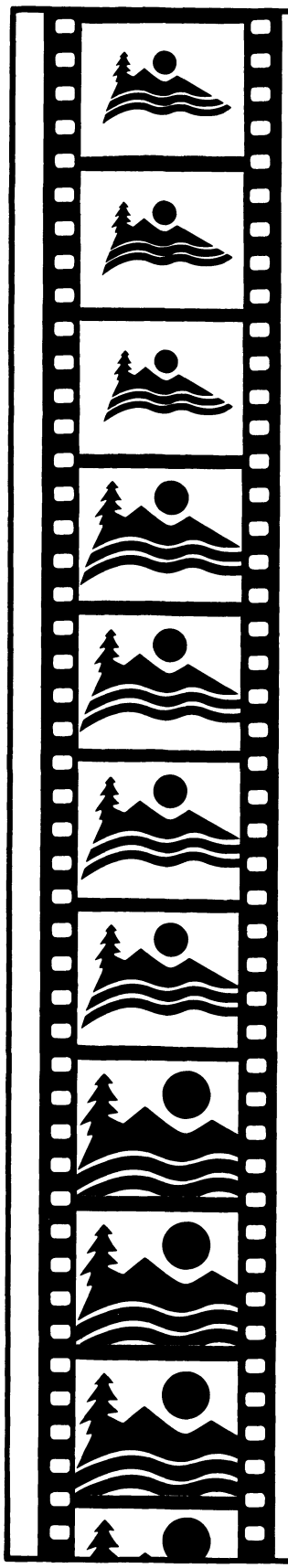

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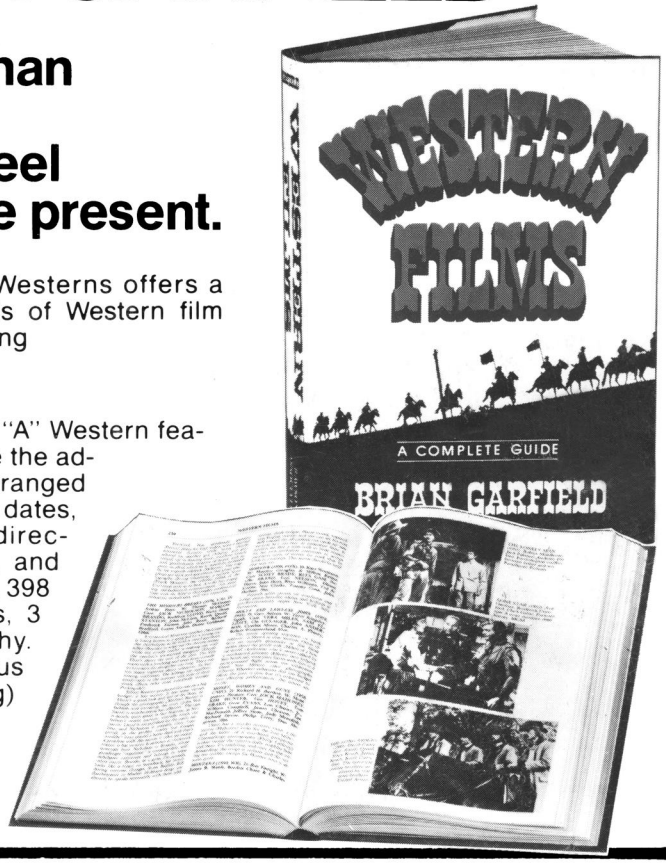
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